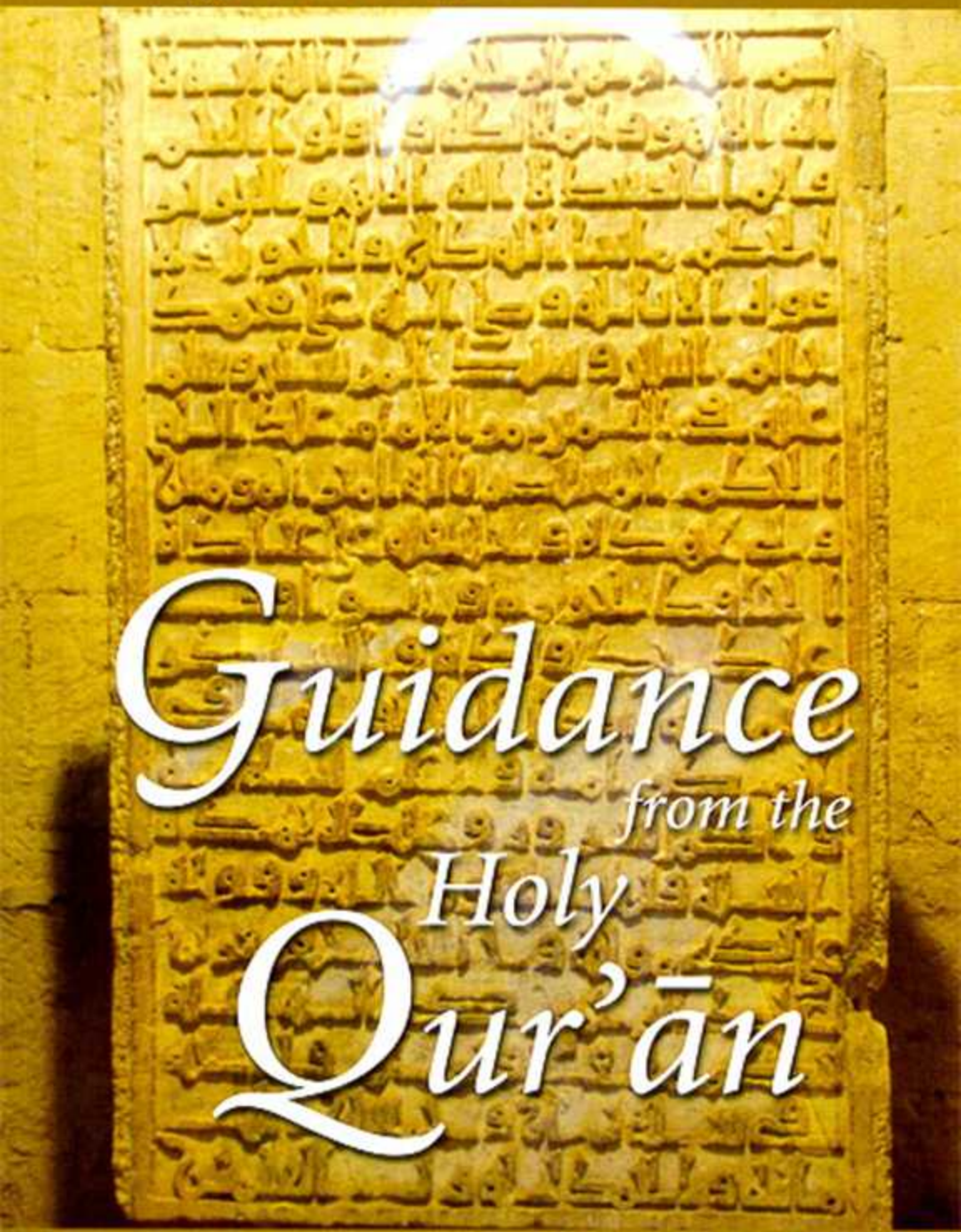
Sayyid Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī



Guidance from the Holy Qur'ān

THE ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

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Sayyid Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Nadwī

Translated by
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THE ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

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Transliteration Table

Consonants. Arabic

initial: unexpressed medial and final:

ء ʾ	د d	ض ḍ	ك k
ب b	ذ dh	ط ṭ	ل l
ت t	ر r	ظ ẓ	م m
ث th	ز z	ع ʿ	ن n
ج j	س s	غ gh	هـ h
ح ḥ	ش sh	ف f	و w
خ kh	ص ṣ	ق q	ي y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

Short:	ـَ a	ـِ i	ـُ u
long:	ـَا ā	ـِي ī	ـُو ū
diphthongs:	ـَوْ aw		
	ـَيْ ay		

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Preface

It is our great privilege to publish this valuable work on *Tafsīr* by the renowned twentieth-century Islamic scholar, Shaykh Sayyid Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Nadwī (d.1999). Although it is not a complete *tafsīr*, it embodies Shaykh Nadwī's insightful comments on around ninety Qur'ānic passages. His elucidation brings into sharper light the eternal guidance of the Qur'ān on a wide range of issues relating to both individual and collective life – articles of faith, acts of worship and service to Allah, social relations, morals and manners, laws, religious duties, *Sīrah*, materialism and lessons from the Qur'ān.

Throughout his illustrious life Shaykh Nadwī strove for the cause of Islam. At numerous gatherings he delivered talks in order to put across the message of the Qur'ān. The present work is a collection of these talks, which facilitates a better understanding of the Qur'ān. Being thoroughly grounded in the immensely rich field of Islamic scholarship, and displaying a native-like command over Arabic, Shaykh Nadwī brings home valuable points in these talks which are aimed at preaching the meaning and message of the Qur'ān. More remarkably, these talks are addressed to twenty-first century Muslims, guiding them to grasp and derive the wisdom embodied in the Qur'ān. Indeed all the works and writings of Shaykh Nadwī went a long way in promoting the call of the Qur'ān. The Islamic Foundation, therefore,

felt privileged to publish this English translation of Shaykh Nadwī's work, entitled *Qur'ānī Ifādāt* in the original Urdu.

I take this opportunity to thank Mawlānā Sayyid Rābiʿ Nadwī, Rector, Nadwat al-ʿUlamā', Lucknow, India for giving the Foundation the permission to produce this work in English. I am thankful also to my colleague, Professor Abdur Raheem Kidwai, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India for translating Shaykh Nadwī's work into English. I must thank Mr. Nasir Cadir, Islamic Foundation, for his valuable help in the production of this work. May Allah accept this effort from Foundation in the cause of the Qur'ān. (*Āmīn*).

Leicester, UK
1426H/2005

Dr. M. Manazir Ahsan
Director General

[1]
Qur'ānic Teachings

1. Introduction

All praise be to Allah. We celebrate His glory and seek His assistance. We place our trust in Him and seek His protection from the evil of our own self and from bad deeds. One who is guided by Allah cannot be led astray. One who is led astray by Him cannot find any guide. We testify that there is no god besides Allah, the True One. He is without any partner. We also affirm that Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger. Allah's blessings be upon him, his family and his Companions. May Allah shower upon them immense rewards. I seek Allah's refuge against the accursed Satan. I begin in the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. "*Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself who turns to Him in repentance and obedience.*" (*al-Shūrā* 42:13)

The marvels of the Qur'ān are inexhaustible. It guides man at every step, catering for his needs and resolving his problems. I have personally experienced this on numerous occasions. While asked to deliver a talk, I could not often decide, even right up to the time I rose to speak, on the topic of my speech. However, as someone recited a Qur'ānic passage to mark the commencement of my talk, I realised that the passage was addressed in particular to me, as a

cue for me to choose my topic. It seemed as if the passage had been selected precisely for this purpose. I experienced this often during my travels abroad. For I could not make up my mind about the subject of my talk until literally the last minute. In the hurly-burly of travel it is difficult to choose a topic to speak about, especially at those gatherings of which I had not been informed of in advance. On such occasions I prayed to Allah to guide me. In sum, without exercising my discretion, I was guided to take up the subject matter embedded in the Qur'ānic passage recited by someone prior to my delivery.

Let me now provide some background information about my study of the Qur'ān. As a child my education commenced with a study of the Qur'ān. I was fortunate enough to study at the feet of Shaykh Khalīl ibn Muḥammad Yamānī who was deeply immersed in the Qur'ān. Not only was he a Qur'ānic scholar, he was also devoted heart and soul to the Book. Whenever he recited the Qur'ān, tears rolled down his cheeks. I was impressed most by his mode of recitation which was characterised by pathos. It reinforced the thrust of the Qur'ānic passages recited by him. For at numerous places the Qur'ān laments man's indifference to the divine message and its resultant loss.

As to the temper of the Qur'ān, it is illustrated by the following incident involving the Prophet's closest Companion, Abū Bakr. When Abū Bakr was requested to lead the Prayer, in place of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the former's daughter and the Prophet's wife, ʿĀ'ishah insisted that he should not be given this assignment in view of his tender heart and his tendency to cry profusely. He was so awe-struck by the Qur'ān that he found it difficult to recite, so much so that those praying behind him could not listen to his recitation. Almost the same point about Abū Bakr's proneness to crying was made by the Makkan polytheists; though in a different context. Abū Bakr had a mosque constructed in front of his house. As he recited the Qur'ān aloud in Prayers, Muslims assembled there, including women and children. His recitation marked by pathos had a deep impact on its listeners. This, however, caused concern

among the Quraysh, for it deeply affected the faith of Makkans. In turn, it would have struck a blow to their power and authority. The point being that the Qur'ān must be recited with just such pathos and firm conviction as demonstrated by Abū Bakr.

To my good fortune, my first teacher was a tender-hearted person. We wished that he would recite for long periods of time, enabling us to listen to him. He also led the *Fajr* Prayer at the mosque in our locality. Rarely however could he complete a *sūrah*. For as he commenced reciting, he was overcome with tears and his voice choked. This happened almost every day. He taught me selected Qur'ānic *sūrahs*, especially the ones focusing on the doctrine of monotheism. This commenced with his lessons on *Sūrah al-Zumar*. Later on, I was more preoccupied with my study of language and literature. However, he nonetheless drew me closer to the Qur'ān.

After completing my education, I turned my attention again to a study of the Qur'ān. I made a point of studying books in addition to the texts prescribed in *Madrasahs*. In pursuance of this objective, I went to Lahore and studied the whole of the Qur'ān at the feet of Mawlānā Aḥmad ʿAlī. His total devotion to the Qur'ān impressed me most. Whatever he said and did was prompted by the Qur'ān. This cast a spell on my heart. His piety, his ascetic way of life and his adherence to the *Sunnah* in every action impressed me much. I then spent some time at Dār al-ʿUlūm, Deoband. During my stay there I sought an appointment with Mawlānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī so as to benefit from his elucidation of some difficult Qur'ānic passages. These points were left unresolved in standard *tafsīr*. Mawlānā Madanī was one of the distinguished *ʿUlamā'* of the day. Apart from his expertise in *Ḥadīth* studies and other disciplines, he had carried out an intensive study of the Qur'ān. His life style-reflected the fruits of his special study. I was fortunate that he granted me time on Fridays to discuss with him such Qur'ānic verses as I found hard to fathom. The Mawlānā was a frequent traveller and this was a period of hectic political activity. Yet I managed to draw, to some extent, upon his scholarship.

I have also had the privilege of discussing the meaning of some Qur'ānic verses with Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī. I listened to some of his talks on the Qur'ān as well. To my mind Mawlānā Nadwī was not equalled by anyone in his deep understanding of the Qur'ān. This may come as a revelation to some, for the Mawlānā's fame rests mainly on his singular contribution to history, theology and philosophy. However, in my opinion, he was one of the leading scholars of the Qur'ān in the whole of the Indo-Pak subcontinent in terms of the depth and range of his study. What accounted, in the main, for this was his thorough familiarity with the Arabic language and its literature, as also rhetoric and Qur'ānic studies. His companionship with Mawlānā Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāḥī had further sharpened his insights into the Qur'ān. I recall his perceptive exposition of *Sūrah al-Jumu'ah* when I was at Dār al-Muṣannifīn, Azamgarh. I have yet to hear such a scholarly, articulate talk on the Qur'ān. I wish it could have been recorded for posterity. I have however had little opportunity to draw upon the Sayyid's scholarship. When I was appointed a teacher at Dār al 'Ulūm Nadwat al-'Ulamā', I was assigned the teaching of the Qur'ān. At the Nadwa the standard teaching practice focuses on the text, and this text-based study was perhaps first introduced at the Nadwa. This practice was followed later in other institutions. In my opinion, this is the best approach. The text should be taken up first. No reference should be made at the initial stage to any *tafsīr*. The teacher should be fully conversant with the text and share his observations with students. For several years I have had the privilege of teaching the Qur'ān. I also taught *tafsīr* as well. However, I was more inclined towards a text-based study. Of all the subjects entrusted to me for teaching, *tafsīr* was the most significant. I have offered the above account in order to indicate that I have been a humble student of the Qur'ān. Whatever little I know, I attribute to my study of the Qur'ān. Those familiar with my writings know well that my discourse is always rooted in the Qur'ān. For this has been my main source. My next favourite area of study is history. Let me, however, clarify that my study of history too, is guided and shaped by the Qur'ān. I always interpret it with reference to the Holy Book.

2. The Miracle of the Qur'ān

It is the Qur'ān alone which enriches us. Let us present before you some gems gleaned from the treasure-house that is the Qur'ān. Its wealth suffices for the whole of mankind. Only the Qur'ān can enrich the super-rich, mighty rulers and flourishing business tycoons. It can change their fortunes. Rather, it can make them rich in the real and abiding sense of the term.

The Qur'ān elevates one from an abysmal low to the ultimate zenith. By the same token, those who do not pay heed to it are disgraced by it, rubbing their noses in dust. For the Qur'ān transformed the pauper Arab bedouins, without food and clothing to such an unprecedented height of worldly power and glory. Petty camel-drivers were exalted to the rank of kings and rulers of all parts of the world. Notorious for their lawlessness and misguidance, they were transformed into the leaders of mankind. They acted as mankind's saviours. Without the Qur'ān, these Arab bedouins would have hardly survived on the world map. However, in the light of Qur'ānic guidance they learnt to rule and govern the world. They even managed to trample under their feet the glory and grandeur of the Persian and Roman emperors of the day. They captured their palaces and empires in no time at all.

Credit for this goes to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) who spent time meditating, wrapped in a sheet. It was he who raised and trained an altogether new community. His hard work helped nurture a band of dedicated followers who established their supremacy the world over. Indeed, his Companions took over the reins of power from the mighty rulers of their day.

The Qur'ān is capable of achieving such transformation. Those indifferent to it turn into utter losers. This is the constant divine law. If the Qur'ān is not acted upon in the right spirit, its bearers are doomed for destruction. The laws enacted by Allah make no discrimination. It is common knowledge that laws are to be respected and applied uniformly. The same holds true of the Qur'ān and divine laws are to be respected and applied uniformly. Those failing to obtain guidance from the Qur'ān are destroyed in accordance with divine law.

3. Study of the Qur'ān and its norms

اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾

Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself who turns to Him in repentance and obedience.

(*al-Shūrā* 42:13)

The verses quoted above make two significant points: Allah choosing someone and then guiding him. It is plainly stated that He chooses for Himself whom He wills. He can elevate anyone to this exalted rank and bless him with His guidance. Nonetheless, guidance is needed by the whole of mankind. Allah guides one who turns to Him in repentance and obedience. However, one must be a genuine seeker of guidance before one is bestowed with this. One who displays such humility, self-surrender and total obedience is guided by Allah to the Straight Way. The important prerequisite here is to turn to Allah wholly. Let us elaborate upon this point further.

The Qur'ān stands out for both its instructions and its emphasis on preaching the truth. A believer is obliged to accept all the articles of faith, grasp these and draw these only from the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān, as we know, is in chaste Arabic. Allah has also declared that He has made its comprehension easy for those who take admonition. Man should thus take heed from it.

It is easy to understand the Qur'ān in terms of ascertaining the main beliefs it projects, the conditions for deriving its guidance and its concepts of monotheism and the Hereafter. It is not therefore difficult to figure out the Qur'ānic worldview. Nor is it a complicated issue as to how to attain deliverance in both worlds. The Qur'ān is explicit and categorical on these issues. No one can claim that he could not learn about these basic truths after studying the Qur'ān. Weighty arguments, delivered in unequivocal terms, on the doctrine of monotheism abound in the Qur'ān. This fundamental truth is articulated effectively and energetically on numerous occasions.

So someone studying the Qur'ān seriously can never indulge in polytheism. One may stumble into error, commit sins, take to the path of apathy by way of not discharging one's religious duties and indulge in wicked deeds. Yet one cannot misconstrue the Qur'ānic stance on monotheism. For its message is as clear as sunlight. Nor can one entertain any doubt about this issue.

The same holds true for the doctrine of Messengership, the duties of this office, the role and function of Messengers and their conduct. For the Qur'ān makes it abundantly clear that they are pious men, having no truck with evil. The Qur'ān contains their extensive accounts, dispelling all misperceptions about their status. *Sūrahs al-A'rāf, Hūd* and *al-Shu'arā'* deal extensively with almost each and every Messenger of Allah. Each of them is introduced and historical evidence is provided about their impeccable credentials.

It is easy to consult the Qur'ān for guidance. No one can contest this truth. However, as to its complex and specialised contents, one cannot claim finality about one's interpretation of these. It is a hazardous move to infer such a meaning from the Qur'ān which is not endorsed by classical or contemporary *'Ulamā'*. Abū Bakr exclaimed: "O Allah! Which refuge can I have under the sky or to which retreat can I take shelter, if I make an unsubstantiated claim about any verse of the Book of Allah?" This demonstrates that the Prophet's Companions followed an extremely cautious approach with regard to Qur'ānic interpretation. Whenever 'Umar explained some Qur'ānic expression, he supplemented this with a remark, seeking Allah's protection from any misconstruing. The Companions realised all too well that it was beyond any of them to master knowledge of the whole of the Qur'ān. This was not an obligation placed on them anyway. In my humble opinion, one should grasp the essence, spirit and objective of the Qur'ān. One's attitude in so doing should be marked by the utmost respect and caution. Even if one cannot decipher all the Qur'ān, yet he may benefit from studying along the proper lines. One blessed with the fear and consciousness of Allah is thus more likely to derive benefits from it. When the Qur'ān is

recited before God-fearing people, their response, as portrayed in the Qur'ān, is as follows: "*Had We sent down this Qur'ān on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rent asunder by the fear of Allah.*" (*al-Ḥashr* 59:21) On reading the Qur'ān, a pious person is shaken to the core of his being, trembling in awe over the realisation that he has in front of him the Word of Allah. Such an attitude helps one derive guidance to the highest degree. One blessed with this response is likely to gain access to the Qur'ān. It is stated in *Ḥadīth* however that there will be some who recite the Qur'ān ritually, yet gaining nothing thereby.

As to the contents of the Qur'ān, as one of its humble students my contention is that it represents a boundless ocean. Even the greatest scholars of all time and place cannot fathom its depths. Nor can they move forward in their study without Allah's help and inspiration.

Let this be realised clearly, that it is Allah Who enables one to benefit from it. Only such are benefitted who hold Allah and the Qur'ān in awe, earnestly realising their glory. Such are inspired to advance their knowledge. One should recite the Qur'ān in one's *nafl* (additional) Prayers, imagining that it is being sent down upon one's own heart. Filled with this thought one should try to immerse oneself in the message of the Qur'ān. Study of the Qur'ān is beyond academic exercise. In this respect one should also refrain from seeking justification for one's presuppositions in study.

Moreover, one should acknowledge one's limitations in this study, and ascribe observations to this limited understanding. Never should one make tall claims about one's original thinking. Any claim for having discovered some new meaning must be shunned. For this amounts to discrediting the Qur'ān, suggesting that its meaning could not be grasped for fourteen hundred years or more. The Qur'ān asserts that it is in chaste Arabic, sent down by Allah so that man may reflect upon it. In view of this assertion it is odd for anyone to claim that he has discovered its meaning for the first time after many centuries have elapsed. Moreover, it implies that for all this time no one has been able to draw any benefit from it. While

inaugurating a seminar at Aligarh Muslim University, I brought home the point that scholars generally present the fruits of their study in a very humble, modest way, underscoring the fact that they arrived at their conclusions in the light of years of long study. It does not befit a scholar to insist that his conclusion alone is the correct one, dismissing earlier studies. It is held that the Qur'ān never will become out-dated. Its marvels are inexhaustible. Were one to spend one's entire life, even if it be as long as that granted to the Prophet Noah (peace and blessings be upon him), on reflecting on the meaning of the Qur'ān, one will discover new layers of meaning every day. Given this, it is tendentious for anyone to claim originality in their interpretation.

One should carry out one's personal study of the Qur'ān, with the realisation that it is the Book of eternal guidance, sent down by Allah. This personal note should be part of one's stance on the Qur'ān. For it helps one derive more guidance. One should take it as a Book addressed to oneself in particular, holding out a mirror to one's own shortcomings and as diagnostic of one's own weaknesses.

Everyone can easily relate to the Qur'ān. Nonetheless, this is possible only when one approaches it as a living Book meant for one's own reform. One should look for self-development in it before prescribing it to others. This was the way of the Messengers. First, they attained self-development and then admonished others. Some study the Qur'ān so as to employ its arguments in humbling and discrediting others. The Prophet's Companions, however, studied it so as to mend their own ways. As soon as they grasped the thrust of a verse, they immediately acted upon it. They took months for example in completing their study of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*.

I have made the above points as a humble student. Let us strive as much as possible to turn to Allah in repentance and obedience. Allah may choose us if He so wills. We cannot take any step on this count. Nonetheless, it is up to us to learn, seek guidance and change our outlook on life as much as possible in the light of our study. The Qur'ān is there to guide us. It will help us reach our destination.

We should realise the need for Qur'ānic guidance, of turning to it and for our lack of resources. This constitutes the turning to Allah. Let us supplicate to Allah to infuse this realisation into us: *Show us the Straight Way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not the way of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray.* (*al-Fātiḥah* 1:6-7)

4. Qur'ānic Guidance

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن
يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي
أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ
فَقَالَ أَنبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَٰٓؤُلَاءِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ قَالُوا سُبْحَٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ
لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾ قَالَ يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ أَنۢبِئْهُم بِأَسْمَآئِهِمْ ۖ
فَلَمَّآ أَنۢبَأَهُم بِأَسْمَآئِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُل لَّكُمْ إِنِّيٓ أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place mankind on earth. They said: Will You place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and thanks and sanctify You. Allah said: I know that which you do not know. And He taught Adam all the names, then He showed them to the angels and said: Tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful. They said: Glorified are You, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. It is You, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Allah said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the Unseen in the heavens and the earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?

(*al-Baqarah* 2:30-33)

I often read the above passage. It recounts the dialogue between Allah and the angels when Allah had decided to appoint Adam, man's progenitor, as His vicegerent on earth. Man was to be entrusted with authority over natural resources, utilising these in a constructive way so as to enjoy his life in a meaningful way. Man was also assigned the duty of maintaining his close link with his Creator, Allah, of forging cordial relations with his fellow human beings and drawing upon divine bounties in accordance with divine commands and teachings. Allah decided to appoint man, made of clay yet possessing celestial features, as His vicegerent. On coming to know this, the angels submitted: "*We glorify You with praise and thanks and sanctify You.*" In other words, they asked whether they were not fit for this assignment, particularly in view of their constant celebration of Allah's praise. Allah directed them however to observe the unfolding of events. This would persuade them of the rationale behind His selection of man as His vicegerent. Accordingly, both Adam and the angels were put to the test. Adam's nature was made receptive to learning and recognising names, realising their innate potential and power and drawing upon these for his own benefit. In short, he was enabled to maintain an easy, feasible link with material things and to utilise these for his advantage.

Adam was thus first instructed in the names of things. Then the same was presented before the angels. When Adam was asked to name things, he gave correct answers. When the same question was put to the angels, in accord with their essential nature they acknowledged their limitations conceding that their knowledge was restricted to what Allah had taught them. They were aware only of their obligations. They openly said: "*Glorified are You, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. It is You, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.*" Thus Allah demonstrated that His choice of man as His vicegerent was perfectly justified.

The dialogue between Allah and the angels at the time of Adam's creation is equally very perceptive. The Qur'ān relates it thus: "*And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place mankind on earth.*"

Another significant statement is: "*He taught Adam all the names.*" One thus learns that man has been granted certain knowledge which is essential for his survival in this material world. As Allah's vicegerent he enjoys the power and authority to draw upon natural resources. He has not been accorded absolute, unlimited power. Rather, he derives authority as delegated to him. The Qur'ān alludes to this truth at another place thus: "*Spend of that of which He has made you trustees.*" (*al-Ḥadīd* 57:7)

In Qur'ānic parlance vicegerency is a serious assignment. It entails justice, equity and love for fellow human beings. More importantly, it is linked inextricably with the concept of accountability. That man as vicegerent does not have total, unrestricted authority does not call for any elaboration. A vicegerent, by definition, is always submissive and obedient to his master, conscientious in performing the duties assigned to him and ever grateful to his lord and benefactor. He ascribes all that he has to his master. He never grows proud and haughty. Nor is he ever intoxicated by power.

The West has, however, disregarded this truth. As a result, the whole human history and man's heritage of learning have been tainted. This was not the result of an individual's folly or the lapse of a particular group or generation. Rather, it has been a colossal error on the part of the entire academic world and its thinkers. They could have guided mankind to the right way. However, this was not to be and instead a great misfortune, vitiated by sheer negligence and ignorance has occurred. History has been gripped by this error. It has rather compounded ignorance and set in motion a chain of mistakes. It is rightly observed by a thinker that man is always prone to committing mistakes. The whole world is still suffering from the ill consequences of this fatal error. Mankind appears to have paid no heed to the truths enunciated by the Qur'ān in its recounting of the dialogue between Allah and the angels, as Adam was bestowed with knowledge. This event does however contain a great lesson for those who act on reason.

The main thesis of the Qur'ān is that man is Allah's vicegerent. He does not enjoy any original position. Rather, he has been sent down in order to accomplish Allah's mission. If man recognises this truth, he should first ascertain divine will, communicated to him by the Messengers and by the Scriptures granted to these Messengers. He should strive to imbibe divine attributes. Man should realise fully that Allah is the Lord of the worlds, Cherisher of all creatures, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful, Just, Most Forbearing, and Most Affectionate. Man should, therefore, use the faculties granted him for justice, compassion and love. However, if man abuses his knowledge for Satanic ends, this amounts to being treacherous towards the spirit and goal of Allah's vicegerency. It also represents infidelity towards his progenitor.

5. Messengers as Guides

وَقَالُوا۟ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى هَدَىٰنَا لِهَٰذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِىَ لَوْلَآ أَنْ هَدَىٰنَا ٱللَّهُ ۖ لَقَدْ جَآءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِٱلْحَقِّ ۖ ... ﴿٤٣﴾

They will say: All praise and thanks are Allah's, Who has guided us to this, and never could we have found guidance, were it not that Allah had guided us! Indeed the Messengers of our Lord did come with the truth.

(*al-Aʿrāf* 7:43)

The Qur'ān reports above the response of those admitted to Paradise. They will express their praise of Him for having admitted them to Paradise which Allah stated as an important truth. They could not attain this coveted place by dint of their own intelligence, academic accomplishment or personal effort. It was Allah's mercy and guidance that led them to their destination.

As stated above, their intellectual abilities alone did not guide them. Nor were they helped by experience. Any spiritual exercises on

their part, perhaps involving extreme self-abnegation did not drive them either. Any philosophical thought or intellectual movement did not steer them. Without Allah's help they could not enter Paradise.

A further truth is also clarified whereby Allah does not descend to the earth to guide each and every human being. Nor does He take anyone's hand in His in order to show him the way to Paradise. Instead, He has devised certain ways for man's guidance. Of these the most prominent is His arrangement of sending down His Messengers who come with the truth. They transmit to mankind Allah's message which constitutes the way to attain deliverance. They guide man to his ultimate destination. It is they who lead those who are astray to the way of truth and thus they perform a valuable service to mankind. Had they not come with the truth, man would have been lost in error. He would have certainly landed in a place other than Paradise.

Man should not lose sight of this important truth. Intellectuals, philosophers, politicians and the worldly wise cannot perform this onerous duty. Only the Messengers of Allah help mankind in this respect. No one other than them can be of any support in this particular domain. Once man embraces the truth preached by them, he is in a position to appreciate the ultimate reality and properly utilise divine bounties and faculties. Rather, he is able then to guide others to the truth. Those engaged in preaching the call to the truth and in interpreting faith should constantly bear this fact in mind, *viz.* that their main source is the message presented by the Prophets. Without these Messengers no one could have access to the truth.

Allah's Messengers came to the earth at regular intervals. In their respective time and space they guided those lost in error and ignorance, constituting millions of human beings. They helped the ignorant embrace faith which, in turn, entitled them to enter Paradise. It was through their agency that mankind learnt about the gnosis of Allah, the purpose behind creation and the right way to lead life. They alone showed the way to approaching Allah. Their guidance is safe against error, ignorance or misinterpretation. There is no deliverance other than that identified by them. Reason is not

of much help in this regard. Sharp intelligence too, does not work in this case. Worldly knowledge, skills, balanced thinking, wit and wisdom cannot deliver the goods either. This truth is articulated in the passage quoted above by the dwellers of Paradise. It amounts to stating the obvious that they are truthful people. Based on their first-hand experience and without indulging in any exaggeration they proclaim that without Allah's guidance they could never have reached anywhere near Paradise. They are seen openly and emphatically acknowledging the role of Messengers in their success. For they exclaim: "*Indeed the Messengers of our Lord did come with the truth.*"

The advent of Messengers enables man to attain the privilege of Allah's gnosis. More importantly, it helps man figure out His will and commands. Accordingly, man adheres to divine commands in order to earn Allah's pleasure. Ultimately this wins him entry into Paradise.

Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt lays bare the error of polytheists and their false notions. It denies the baseless things attributed by polytheists to Allah. For these do not befit this glory. The *Sūrah* concludes thus: *Glorified is your Lord, the Lord of honour and power. He is free from what they attribute to Him. And peace be upon the Messengers. And all praise and thanks are Allah's, the Lord of all that exists.* (*al-Ṣāffāt* 37:180-182)

Together, the above three verses make a significant point. As Allah refuted the false notions of polytheists, He entrusted the Messengers with the job of presenting a sound concept of Him. They revealed His attributes. As a result, Allah sent down on them His blessings and praised them for their excellent conduct. For it is they who properly introduced the Creator to His creatures. Their advent thus constitutes an immense blessing for mankind. It is part of Allah's grand plan and it is prompted by His mercy and providence. This point is, therefore, concluded on a note celebrating Allah's praise. The only way to deliverance consists in adhering to the Messengers' way. Until the Last Day the message of the final Prophet, Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), is valid. Man's success is contingent on his following his teachings, in observing his *Sunnah* and in emulating his excellent example.

6. The Message of the Qur'an

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنسَاهُمْ أَنفُسَهُمْ ... ﴿١٩﴾

And be not like those who forgot Allah, and He caused them to forget their own selves.

(*al-Ḥashr* 59:19)

Man is by nature self-centred. His own interests preoccupy him. His love for others is prompted by selfish ends. Therefore, he loves those who love him. He is not drawn to those who hate him, even though he may be a paragon of virtue. Self-love activates man to undertake numerous pursuits. All his actions are centred on this. Man may forget everything but his self-interests are always close to heart. He may disregard even his wife, children, family members and relatives at the expense of ensuring his own welfare. This is often observed in an hour of crisis. It is an everyday occurrence, for it is rooted deep in human nature. One who contends against this observation is most likely to be refuted by everyone. For it is quite an event, to find someone practising self-abnegation while working for the welfare of others. The one who disregards his own interests for the sake of others inevitably becomes the centre of attention. At times, he may risk his own life to rescue others. Let us therefore discuss this phenomenon at some length.

The Qur'ān proclaims that those forgetful of Allah are liable to forget their own selves. Once man banishes God from his life, his orientation is disturbed. He is wholly given over to worldliness. He is seen hankering after material objects, oblivious to higher truths. Material things become an end in themselves. Lost in this maze, he forgets his own self. This obviously results in a crisis, bringing an end to such a person's feelings and emotions. No longer does he regret the loss incurred by him. Rather the malaise is on account of a shift in focus, as man replaces God with his own self. The more he turns away from God, the greater is the risk of self-destruction.

In our times the thrust of this Qur'ānic passage has become much more pronounced, in comparison to earlier times. For man is now totally self-centred. He is given to newer and more means of entertainment and luxury. Self-centredness has assumed the form of a whole philosophy of life, one that is publicised on a very wide scale. It is common knowledge that whereas man is much concerned over each and every issue, he pays scant attention to his ultimate end. He hardly seems to care about his final destination. His enjoyment of life is little, though he spends all his time on worldly pursuits. He is reduced to a cog in a wheel. He leads his life like a robot, shorn of real feelings and emotions.

His life has become too mechanical, with his basic needs thus being met. He is bound ruthlessly to social customs, obliged to lead a certain standard of life, as he works for others. All his time and energy are for others. His movements are governed by others as well. What he lacks is real joy, nutritious food, healthy surroundings, spiritual solace, peace of mind, and such love and joy which may satisfy him. He has little time and energy to reflect on the higher issues of life. His mechanical life enervates him so much, sapping his heart and mind, that he is not even aware of his loss. He does not even have control over himself and his surroundings.

The divine punishment for banishing God from both our private and public lives is terrible. What a great pity then that vast empires populated by millions of men and women are guilty of this heinous crime. There is a sense of general apathy everywhere. No one seems concerned about such open rebellion of God. There is no sense of loss over the material way of life, which turns us blind to noble objectives. Nor is there any real wealth or comfort. On the one hand, there is an abundance of food items and medicines and on the other, no one enjoys good health. Fast modes of transport are meant for comfort. Yet speed now has become a goal unto itself. There are problems of all sorts, both natural and man-made. Whilst it is easy to travel, man has lost his sense of direction. In the past, it was hazardous to undertake a journey but today the risks of travelling have been

reduced considerably. However, the objective of travel has become meaningless. Where once it was hard for one town to communicate with another, now there are swift means of communicating. Nonetheless, human relationships have become devoid of love and affection. Selfish motives dictate every move. While it was once quite a task to gather news, now, people are tired of false and tendentious information. Such abuse of the means of communication has reduced technological equipment to a nuisance, rather a curse. Life has lost its meaning, purpose and direction.

The Qur'ānic view is that this malaise stems from our forgetting God. Our only way out therefore consists in seeking God. Faith, obedience, submission are the only solution. Mankind should shun rebellion and revolt, disobedience and indifference to God. The sooner mankind turns to Allah, the better it will be.



[II]
Da'wah (Call to the Truth)

1. The Norms of *Da'wah*

ٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلْحِكْمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ ... ﴿١٢٥﴾

Invite [mankind] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching.

(*al-Naḥl* 16:125)

It is not possible to enumerate upon all the norms of preaching the call to truth. For it depends much on and varies with the level of intellect and predilection of the addressee of *Da'wah*. The Arabic expression *ḥikmah* (wisdom) is nonetheless pregnant with such a wide range of meanings that one may compile a huge volume containing explanations of this single expression and its connotations. In keeping with the level of understanding, capacity, social customs, regional variations, tastes, interests, contemporary issues and challenges and psychological factors, and more importantly, the beliefs and worldview of the persons at whom *Da'wah* is directed, one should evolve suitable norms. Every mode of persuasion for winning over the addressee should be included in this.

While speaking at a conference, I was asked to spell out the principles and norms of *Daʿwah*, its scope, sphere and terminology. To this I replied: Let me answer you with the help of a parable. Once someone employed a servant and gave him a list of jobs to be done. One day while he was about to mount a horse, the master's feet became stuck in the saddle and he was about to drop to the ground. As he called out to his servant for help, the latter waved his list of jobs at him, which did not include rescuing his master from a fall. The same holds true for *Daʿwah*. We cannot enumerate or describe its norms precisely. As servants of the Creator of this universe, we are His slaves who should be ever-ready to perform all that is demanded of us.

Having said that it is nonetheless useful to gain some familiarity with the history of *Daʿwah*, its objectives and goals. Equally important is knowledge of the tactful and wise mode the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* employ in *Daʿwah*. We should bear in mind the revivalist mission of our illustrious ancestors who strove in their varied ways for the cause of Islam. Let me recount an incident reported in the Qur'ān which brings into view many of the norms and principles of *Daʿwah*:

> *And there entered with him two young men in prison. One of them said: Verily, I saw myself [in a dream] pressing wine. The other said: Verily, I saw myself [in a dream] carrying bread on my head and birds were eating thereof. They said: Inform us of the interpretation of this. Verily, we think you are one of those who do good.*
>
> *Joseph said: No food will come to you as your provision, but I will inform you of its interpretation before the food comes. This is part of the duty which my Lord has taught me. I have abandoned the way of the people who do not believe in Allah and even deny the Hereafter. I follow the ways of my fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and never could we attribute any partners to Allah. This is from the grace of Allah to us and to mankind, but most men do not thank. O two companions of the prison! Are many different lords [gods] better or Allah,*

the One, the Irresistible? You do not worship besides Him but only names which you have forged, you and your fathers, for which Allah has not sent down any authority. The command is for none but Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Allah. That is the true religion, but most men do not know.

(*Yūsuf* 12:36-40)

In the above passage the Qur'ān states the mode of *Da'wah* adopted effectively by the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him). He carried out this difficult work from inside prison, his efforts marked by caution, intelligence and tact. Let us study this then in some detail. As to the issue of how he carried out *Da'wah*, the Qur'ān answers this at length in its own inimitable style. It goes without saying that before conducting any business, one first looks for a suitable place, offering peace and security. Moreover, one needs tact to do business. If one arrives at a shop at closing time and is told to visit the next day, one is naturally offended by such discourtesy. Such a customer is not likely to approach that shop in the future. For he was denied a facility at a time when it was needed most. Everyone wants that his needs be met first. Time is also crucial in any business transaction. If one is asked by a shopkeeper to revisit the premises after a few hours, the customer quickly becomes disheartened. Everyone loves to achieve a bargain or discount in a transaction. The person in need expects others' full attention. If a patient suffering from a fever calls on a physician, the latter is obliged to prescribe some medicine both for the fever and any other ailment he diagnoses. He is supposed to carry out a thorough check of his patient.

The above points are not generally made in standard *tafsīr* works. One may deduce them however by dint of one's close study of the Qur'ānic text. If one embraces faith after reciting the above passage about the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him), it is further testimony to the miracle that is the Qur'ān. For many points in the passage are worth noting. Two fellow prisoners approached

Joseph to inform them of the meaning of their dreams. Before doing so, they had ascertained that he was a man of impeccable integrity, honesty, truthfulness and knowledge. They recognised such special abilities. These prisoners may not have been familiar with the concept of Prophethood yet they could sense Joseph's piety, chastity and holiness. A preacher of truth should be of such appearance and conduct that everyone should be drawn to him. Such a preacher should also pay full attention to seekers after the truth. These prisoners, as we note, were irresistibly drawn towards the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him). In his turn, he looked after them very well. One also learns from this Qur'ānic passage that one engaged in *Da'wah* should have a distinct identity which appeals to those around one.

As soon as the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) entered prison, his fellow inmates realised that he was not some convict. Rather, they were convinced of his innocence. They looked upon him as one persecuted; a virtuous person dragged into prison, by others who had falsely implicated him. For those in prison can readily tell whether someone is a culprit or not. To sum up, everyone there was impressed by Joseph's piety in their heart of hearts. So much so that his two fellow prisoners asked him to interpret their dreams for them, which he did. They had guessed that he possessed some special knowledge. Otherwise, there was nothing on record in the prison to indicate his expertise in this field.

In every age Allah has blessed man, of every class, including those who are illiterate, to discern between good and evil. Based on the same knowledge, they recognised that Joseph was not a culprit. Upon meeting him they exclaimed: "*Verily, we think you are one of those who do good.*" The expressions used by them connote that they took him to be a man of special ability, nobility, generosity and high moral standing. They had collected their necessary background information before approaching him.

Another point worth noting is that one need not act modestly on each and every occasion. If one puts before someone a question and

out of modesty the latter makes no contribution, he will be taken as ignorant. The prisoners' request was only that Joseph should interpret their dreams for them. In his reply, however, he asserted that he possessed the requisite knowledge to answer their questions.

The Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) could have fixed a later time for their audience. However, he availed himself of the opportunity then and there lest they choose not to return. Here is a lesson for those engaged in *Da'wah*. They should immediately meet the needs of their addressees. The Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) then made mention of food. In prison life food assumes far greater importance than otherwise. So, in keeping with the psychology of prison inmates he referred to food, which would have brought them much joy and strength. Some exegetes interpret this allusion as meaning that he told them that he would inform them in advance of the food that would be served to them. Hence why, at a later stage in his career, he was placed in charge of the treasures of the land. Nonetheless, the allusion is not to the variety of food. Rather, Joseph meant that he would interpret their dreams. The situation called for some bragging on his part. He could take much pride in asserting that with his enviable faculties of intelligence and sharpness he could provide meaning and that he had proved his mettle on numerous earlier occasions. However, far from this, he used the opportunity to instruct them in the doctrine of pure monotheism. His focus throughout is on Allah's creative power, Oneness and holiness. His sermon is an exhaustive account of divine attributes. He does not condemn false gods. Nor does he resort to any other negative point making. Instead he tells them only what his Lord had taught him. This did not involve any attack on anyone. He does not ascribe his knowledge to family traditions. Nor does he attribute his achievements to his upbringing. Rather, he explains that this knowledge was bestowed upon him by Allah. He makes a point of stating that he was an adherent of the faith of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He mentions their names, for they, being distinguished persons, would have been known to his

fellow inmates. He does not however, claim any credit for himself, but thanks Allah profusely for His favours. The Qur'ān recounts his gratitude thus: *This is from the grace of Allah to us and to mankind, but most men do not thank.*

Availing himself of this opportunity, the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) addressed his two fellow prisoners thus: "*O two companions of the prison! Are many different lords [gods] better or Allah, the One, the Irresistible?*" He expressed himself thus because he apprehended that his adherence to this faith would make the king hostile towards him. He therefore took his fellow inmates into his confidence, addressing them as "companions". Such tactics are not an anathema to the office of Prophethood. However, Joseph stopped at this point in his account of faith, lest the two prisoners grew weary. For they had approached him only to find out the meaning of their dreams. They were not there to listen to a long sermon. They were after all already upset over the disturbing dreams they had experienced. Keeping in mind these psychological factors the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) made only a brief mention of his faith.

As regards *Da'wah* there are limits which one should adhere to. One should be careful, for example, about the amount of time devoted to it. Furthermore, it should contain a mix of history and literary embellishment. The description too should be simple and easy to understand. Being a Messenger, who hailed from a family of Messengers, Joseph was fully aware of these norms. In his story is a lesson for all those who make a call to Islam. The passage itself abounds in instructions on the methodology, style, mode, and norms of *Da'wah*. For the Prophet Joseph's response suited best his addressees.

2. The Call to the Truth

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا
ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ﴿٢٤﴾ تُؤْتِي أُكُلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا ۗ
وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Do you not see how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly word is as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches reach the sky, giving its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. Allah sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember.

(*Ibrāhīm* 14:24-25)

The verses under discussion provide a graphic account of how to carry out *Da'wah* in any given time and place: how to introduce Islam; how to invite people to it; how to highlight its distinctive features, and, how to guide man in both this life and the Next.

These verses embrace time and space, and speak of the foundation and source of *Da'wah* and its pinnacle. Let us therefore reflect on the simile employed in the verses, i.e. of a good tree. The first and foremost condition is that it should be good. In other words, goodness is the key prerequisite for success in Allah's sight. Intelligence, lofty ideals, plentiful resources, a massive organisation, and intellectual acumen are not worthy in themselves in Allah's reckoning. What is crucial is that they should be wedded to a good objective; one's driving force should be rooted in goodness and the message itself should aim at goodness.

Allah says: '*Do you not see how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly word...*' First, the word or message should be good, mere words are not an end in themselves. It has been a fairly common fallacy in literature, poetry, Greek philosophy and logic that linguistic competence is accorded pride of place. It is erroneously believed that the message

should be well-articulated, characterised by artistic dexterity, and marked by insight, wide scholarship and vivid presentation. On studying world literature, one notes that in its assessment emphasis is only placed on the words, without any reference to it being good words.

Thus, the basic requisite for a message to succeed is that is should comprise good words, leading to good objectives. The message should not simply be couched in linguistic finesse.

Some people are content only with this aspect of the message. On studying the history of religious and theological psychology and of religious movements, it can be readily observed that only the externals of the message have generally been taken up. There has been greater concern with the tactful, impressive presentation of the message rather than its intrinsic value, i.e. the goodness of the message. Little attention is paid to the aims and objectives of the message, its link with the Creator, its indebtedness to revelation, the Scriptures and the teachings of Allah's Messengers. The message should not however be confined only to rhetorical niceties, figures of speech, devices of forcefulness and subtleties of articulation.

THE QUR'ĀNIC SIMILE

The good word is likened in the above verses to a good tree. Numerous other objects could have been used in this similitude, for example, pearls, jewels, gold, silver, fruits or flowers. However, no other simile could have been more apt than that of a good tree in bringing home the fruitfulness and everlasting value of the good word. As in the case of the word, the tree should also be good. The Qur'ān, therefore, refers to it as the good tree. For, in an otherwise situation, good results cannot be ensured. In the same miraculous style, the Qur'ān extends the simile, stating, '*whose root is firmly fixed and its branches reach the sky*'. Reflecting on the meaningfulness and sublimity of these expressions one realises that they encapsulate the history of divine religions, the arduous missions of the Messengers and the moral and spiritual transformations brought about by religion. This history has

not so far been adequately recorded. It is after all quite a considerable task to do. There have been numerous altruistic people who have sacrificed their lives for this noble cause, though we know little about them as individuals.

By mentioning a good tree with its roots firmly fixed and its branches reaching the sky, reference is made to the revolutionary tenor of the Prophet's message or *Da'wah* in that it transforms whole nations. It changes the course of history, affects human thought so much that nation after nation embraces this message. To illustrate the point as to how a simple word conveyed with utter sincerity can work wonders, let me refer to an historical event. This is to reinforce my thesis that sheer knowledge, intelligence, presentation and rhetoric are not sufficient to persuade others. For if the message is to be effective it is imperative that it should emanate from the deep recesses of the heart. One of the main factors behind the phenomenal spread of Islam and its astounding victories is that its message and meaning have been conveyed with the utmost sincerity. For a message originating from the heart moves others' hearts. Let me then recount the historical event I referred to above and which is recorded in T.W. Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam*, as also in other Turkish and Persian sources.

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM HISTORY

Tuqluq Tīmūr Khān (1347-1363) hailed from the Mongol dynasty. As a Prince he was stationed in Kashgar. In the seventh century AH/ thirteenth century CE, the Mongols or Tartars invaded Turkestan and Iran and made their way to Baghdad. They devastated Baghdad in 1258 CE and struck a fatal blow to the Muslim caliphate of the day. It was then widely held that Islam would no longer be a force to be reckoned with. One of the branches of the Mongol dynasty ruled over Turkestan. (It is sheer coincidence that a new revolution is in the offing in Turkestan today, yet is does not strike a chord in our hearts.) Tuqluq Tīmūr was the heir-apparent of Turkestan. Once he was out hunting, and although it is commonplace for hunters to entertain some superstitions, these are at the end of the day baseless.

While Tuqluq Tīmūr was thus out hunting for deer or lion, Allah decided on his conversion to the religion of Islam, this to ensure the *en masse* conversion of the Tartars to Islam. So Tuqluq Tīmūr went out hunting and the game reserve had been sealed on all sides lest some outsider intrude. A Persian saint, Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn, however unwittingly trespassed on the game reserve of the prince who ordered him to be bound hand and foot and brought before him. Angry at the Shaykh's trespassing, the prince told him that a dog was worth more than a Persian. 'Yes', replied the Shaykh. 'if we did not have true faith, we should indeed be worse than dogs'. The Prince asked him what true faith is. The Shaykh then set before him the doctrines of Islam with such fervour and zeal that the heart of the Khan (Tuqluq Tīmūr) that before had been as hard as stone was melted like wax. So terrible a picture did the Shaykh draw of the state of disbelief that the prince was convinced of the blindness of his own errors. He said: 'Bear with me a little, and when I have entered into the possession of the kingdom of my forefather, come to me again".

What the Shaykh told the prince had been conveyed with the utmost sincerity. It therefore, moved his heart. Allah inspired the Shaykh to present the message of Islam in such a befitting way. For unless *Da'wah* is presented by someone who is illumined by inner light and conveyed with heartfelt conviction, it cannot bring about any change in the hearts or minds of others.

Having already taken note of Arnold's report, let us now turn to the Turkish and Persian sources which are more reliable. According to them, the prince asked the Shaykh who was more worthy: a dog or a Persian? To this the Shaykh replied: 'It cannot be decided here and now.' He angrily asked: 'How come, tell me, who is more worthy: a dog or a Persian?' Had the Shaykh told him that a Persian is more worthy, the Prince would have beheaded him. And if he had said a dog was more worthy, the prince would have achieved his purpose of humiliating the Shaykh and so let him go. However, the prince again demanded an answer. The Shaykh replied: 'If I die in a state of faith, I am more worthy. Otherwise this dog is more worthy than

me.' The Prince than asked him about faith and the Shaykh explained it to him.

After this incident, the Shaykh waited a long time for Tīmūr's accession to the throne so that he might meet him and remind him of his promise. While the Shaykh breathed his last, he told his son, Shaykh Rashīd al-Dīn: 'O my son, it was not my privilege to make the prince embrace Islam. Maybe you are destined for it. When you come to know about Tīmūr's possession of the kingdom, make a point of meeting him and reminding him of this event.'

The above account is common to both Arnold's book and Turkish sources. They also report that when Shaykh Rashīd al-Dīn heard about Tuqluq Tīmūr's accession to the throne, he set out on a journey to visit him. However, he could not gain access to the king. Unable to get an appointment, he stayed near the palace and commenced his prayers. At the appointed hours he made *adhān* (the call to the prayer) and offered his supplications. One morning while he made *adhān* for *Fajr* Prayer, this was overheard by the king. He enquired of his servants about this strange sound. They replied that a person staying near the palace made this call and performed certain peculiar rituals. The king summoned the Shaykh and asked him who he was and enquired about the call he repeatedly made. Shaykh Rashīd al-Dīn told him: 'Do you recall once while you were out hunting, you met a Persian scholar with whom you had some conversation?' This was duly recalled by the king. Then Shaykh Rashīd al-Dīn said: 'I am here to testify that my father, Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn, died in a state of faith.' Immediately the king recited Islam's credal statement: *Lā ilāha illal-lāh* (there is no god other than Allah). This account is recorded by both Arnold and the Turkish and Persian sources. After reciting Islam's creed, the king consulted one of his confidants and a leading member of the court. He told him in privacy: 'I have embraced Islam. What do you think?' He replied: 'I am already a Muslim. I have been a Muslim for a long time but for fear of you I have not openly declared it.' Then all members of the king's family and tribe embraced Islam.

THE REQUISITES OF *DA'WAH*

The point I made earlier was that the Qur'ān has not arbitrarily used the expression '*a goodly tree*'. Not a single Qur'ānic expression is incidental to its overall message. For the success of *Da'wah*, the most important thing is that it should be good. Only then can one expect results.

Apart from being good, the tree resembles Islam in its other features in that '*[its] root is firmly fixed and its branches reach the sky*'. Reading the history of Islam one realises how humble its beginning was, how it grew from strength to strength and how it spread to every corner of the world. The spread of Islam has very pertinently been likened to the growth of a tree '*[whose] branches reach the sky*'.

As to the Qur'ānic provision '*by the leave of its Lord*', this also bears out the miracle of the Qur'ān in that this tree will go on yielding its fruits in every season by the leave of its Lord. Thus, it is not simply a good tree, it is eternal as well. It is not subject to the vicissitudes of time. There are trees which perish in the normal course of time. Or they are destroyed by animals or sometimes chopped down by their owners. The Qur'ānic verse provides here a fascinating account of the spatial dimension of Islam in that like a tree its rises from the earth and reaches the sky. As to its temporal aspect, it is valid for all times '*by the leave of its Lord*'.

It is worth noting that during British rule of the Indian subcontinent not so very long ago, it was inconceivable that centres for the study of Islam would one day be established in their own capital, London, and in its vicinity. No one could imagine at that time that the message of Islam would spread to England. There was a time when Christian missionaries swarmed throughout India and they had convinced the British government of the day that India had been presented to them by Jesus Christ for the preaching of Christianity. As a result, there were serious apprehensions about the large-scale apostasy of Muslims. With a view to confronting this threat, Mawlānā Raḥmatullāh Kayrānawī wrote a masterly book called *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq*. At Agra, there was a polemical debate between him and the Rev.

Pfander in which the latter suffered a humiliating defeat. Again, with a view to warding off this challenge, Mawlānā Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Mongayrī initiated the Nadwa movement. I know well that the missionary activities of the day had serious repercussions for Indian Muslims and led to the move for establishing Nadwat al-'Ulamā' at Lucknow, India. This aimed at training and producing Muslim scholars and preachers who were conversant with other faiths, Western languages, particularly English, history and geography so that they could address new generations in their own idiom and guide the Muslim community on current issues and challenges.

The Qur'ānic assertion that this tree will always yield its fruits in every season by the leave of its Lord is evident today. For the tree was planted by the last Messenger, Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), in the Arabian peninsula – the most backward of areas at that time in terms of its political, ideological, intellectual and economic conditions as also because of it being cut off from the rest of the world. However, '*[with its] root firmly fixed and branches reaching the sky*', Islam has now reached every part of the world. Its spread and conquests have given rise to numerous dynasties, universities, centres of learning and spiritual guidance, scholars, thinkers, men of letters and a plethora of writings on almost every subject. It is difficult to compile even a comprehensive bibliography of the material produced by Muslims. Hence '*the goodly word*' spoken first in the Arabian peninsula has reverberated, resonated and re-echoed across the world, yielding its fruits and fructifying like a good tree.

THE CHALLENGES OF *DA'WAH*

Let us now outline certain basic requisites for the success of *Da'wah*. First, one should be fully cognisant of human psychology and hold a good command over language. Linguistic competence is of the utmost importance for *Da'wah*. Apart from common sense and an awareness of the mental make-up of the audience, *Da'wah* should also be well articulated. Some people tend to think that language is irrelevant to *Da'wah*. For them *Da'wah* consists in making one's

views known in whatever form. However, on reading the sermons of Sayyid ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Imām Ḥasan al-Baṣrī one realises the importance they attached to the effective presentation of their views. These sermons reflect their mastery over nuances of language in order to reach their audiences. The rhetorical skills of Ḥajjāj and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī are impressive. Apart from them, Ibn al-Jawzī too, maintains a very high standard of linguistic competence in his works. Being a student of the Arabic language and literature and a compiler of Arabic masterpieces, I came across passages containing excellent literary qualities in the works of Ibn Taymīyah and Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī. Though they are not generally considered as masters of the Arabic language, they are alive to the importance of the language in putting across their views. Sayyid ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī led a life of asceticism and renunciation, yet his sermons reflect his concern for the niceties of language. Generally speaking, their sermons are more reliable and authentic than royal decrees or literary works of the day, for people held these sermons in greater esteem and exercised the utmost care and caution in transmitting them. They are, therefore, a truthful reproduction of the actual words used by saints. Reading collections of these sermons one marvels at their language.

Thus, apart from knowledge and scholarship one should also be well equipped with powerful and effective language. And the most important ingredient is sincerity and an earnest urge to persuade others. If one writes about that which one feels most and from the depths of one's heart, it may have the desired effect on one's readers. So by taking into account these constituents of *Daʿwah*, be it oral or written, it will yield fruits in the West, in the ever-changing times and on speakers of different languages. Allah will grant the best results for *Daʿwah*. For we are assured of this glad tiding that the good word will always yield its fruit in every season by the leave of its Lord. This rules out the excuse that in such changing times as our own the message of Islam will not have any effect, for with the twenty-first century approaching and with the tremendous developments in all realms of thought, science, politics and technology, there is no longer any

scope for *Da'wah*. On this count the Qur'ān gives the very comforting assurance that '*the goodly word*' will continue to have its effect during all times. The Qur'ān, clearly tells us that we should continue our *Da'wah* at all times and in all places. In this way, it is bound to have the desired effect. By employing the expression '*giving its fruit at all times*' the Qur'ān asserts the timelessness of *Da'wah*.

However, it all depends on Allah's will. For the provision '*by the leave of its Lord*' signifies that one should not be over-confident or assume that with one's mental acumen or linguistic competence one will win the day. Success depends solely on Divine Will.

3. The Methodology of *Da'wah*

ٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلْحِكْمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ ۖ وَجَٰدِلْهُم بِٱلَّتِى
هِىَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ
بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

Invite [mankind] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better. Truly your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His way, and He is the best to know those who are guided.

(*al-Naḥl* 16:125)

The above directive is addressed by Allah to His final Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), and in turn, to the last community of believers – the Muslims. For they are not to be followed by another faith community. This passage occurs at the conclusion of *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, spelling out the methodology of *Da'wah*. Allah proclaims: "*Invite [mankind] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching.*"

It is one of the hallmarks of the Qur'ān that it has not strictly identified the limits of carrying out *Da'wah*. Rather, its methodology

and its details have been left to the discretion of those engaged in it. In keeping with the ground realities and acting on common sense preachers to the truth are free to work out its exact form and method. They are urged to decide the course of action in light of their own understanding and perception. The Qur'ān provides only an outline, giving some broad principles which capture the essence of *Da'wah*.

The above Qur'ānic passage makes two points in particular. Those engaged in *Da'wah* have both their freedom and their constraints. They are free to pursue *Da'wah* up to a particular extent. At the same time, they are forbidden from going beyond certain limits. As for the scope and sphere of *Da'wah*, they are directed to invite the whole of mankind. The directive is to call mankind not to faith or sound beliefs but to their Lord. The addressees are not asked in the first place to offer prayers or practise excellent morals and manners or to respect their fellow human beings. All these exhortations are nonetheless implicit in calling them to their Lord. This directive opens up a wide field for both reflection and action. Reference should of course be made to other faiths, human needs and all that affects human life. Yet the most important concern is the call. The Qur'ān does not specify whether the call should be oral or written. Nor is it narrowed down to sermonising alone. Rather, the invitation is an open-ended expression, encompassing all forms of persuasion. As and when situations arise, recourse may be made to the oral or written mode, or to sermonising or any other means of communication. All forms of making the call are valid, as long as these do not violate the norms of the *Sharī'ah*. Attention should be paid to energetic and effective *Da'wah*. The overarching principle is that the call should be made, asking people to ensure their participation in *Da'wah*. This constitutes a golden opportunity for carrying out the call to truth.

The Qur'ānic expression *ḥikmah* is pregnant with meaning. Owing to its numerous nuances it is not easy to translate it into a single expression. Likewise, the Qur'ānic directive that *Da'wah* should constitute fair preaching is open to several interpretations. Once

again, the Qur'ān grants freedom in this exercise and at the same time prescribes some limits. In the above cited passage the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is directed to invite mankind to the way of their Lord with wisdom and fair preaching. Wisdom stands for common sense, tact, persuasive charm, preaching in a way which does not betray any opportunism or bowing down to someone or politicisation. Let it be realised that politics and preaching are poles apart.

Allah directed His beloved Messenger, the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) to approach the accursed tyrant of the day, Pharaoh, inviting him to the divine faith. Yet Moses was instructed to speak to Pharaoh leniently. He was of course to state the truth firmly yet his mode of preaching was to be decent and gentle. For this might help Pharaoh take heed willingly or he may grow fearful of divine punishment. (*Ṭā Hā* 20:43-44) In either case it would bring an end to his disbelief and rebellion. If the truth is stated in a harsh way, it cannot bring about the desired results. Wisdom consists in articulating the truth properly. A dialogue or debate with an unbeliever should be characterised by decency and good manners. The Qur'ān instructs that good practices be observed even in a polemical debate. Those present should be impressed by the preacher's conduct. Even if the main addressees are not won over, the audience is likely to form a good impression of the call. This truth is put across in the following verse: "*Abraham was a community unto himself, obedient to Allah exclusively and he was not of the polytheists.*" (*al-Naḥl* 16:120) Notwithstanding his engagement in polemical debate, Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) is praised in the Qur'ān for his excellent mode of preaching, marked by cogent argument, tact, wisdom and fairness. Elsewhere too, he is spoken of as a devout Muslim who had nothing in common with polytheists. (*Āl 'Imrān* 3:67.) His *Da'wah* work stood out for its underlying wisdom and tactfulness. It was not tainted by any political motive or timidity. Every Muslim is thus obliged to emulate his role model. To assist others to profess sound beliefs, the same method of

Da'wah is preferable. Those involved in *Da'wah* should adopt the attitude of a physician who treats his patients with tenderness, love and affection. A competent physician, notorious for his rudeness, is shunned. Muslims are, therefore, given this directive: *There has come to you a Messenger [Muḥammad] from among yourselves. It grieves him that you receive any injury or difficulty. He is anxious over you. For the believers he is full of pity, kind and merciful.* (*al-Tawbah* 9:128)

It is incumbent on every Muslim to act on the above Qur'ānic advice to carry out *Da'wah* with wisdom, a suitable strategy and with concern and love. This will help win over people to the true faith.

4. The Role of the Muslim Community

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ... ﴿١١٠﴾

You [true believers in Islam] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind. You enjoin good, forbid evil and believe in Allah.

(*Āl 'Imrān* 3: 110)

The Muslim community is the bearer of Allah's final message. Its members are obliged to convey this message to mankind by their word and deed. It is their assignment to lead and guide mankind and to monitor and reform all that happens around them. The Qur'ān declares emphatically that Muslims are the best community. The Qur'ānic expressions in the above passage make it plain that this community is not some weed, growing on its own. Rather, they have been raised for a particular purpose. Allah has evolved them to accomplish a certain mission. It is not within the discretion of Muslims to come out on the side of any particular cause. Rather, the All-Powerful, Supreme Lord has entrusted an assignment to them.

Their mission consists in maintaining and defending moral values and in achieving Allah's plan. As vicegerents of Allah they are to execute the plan of the Creator of this universe.

Since it was part of Allah's grand plan to bring messengership to an end with the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and to maintain Islam as the divine faith until the Last Day, He devised this arrangement. Apart from sending down the final Messenger, Allah evolved a whole community. The Prophet's Companions recognised this truth and considered themselves as the bearers of the final message. When Rustum, the Persian unbeliever, asked Rub'ī ibn 'Āmir as to why he had taken the Muslims along with him to Persia, abandoning their desert surroundings, he promptly replied: "Allah has directed us to approach you so that we may liberate you from servitude to fellow human beings and to render you as servants of Allah alone." It was their job to free the Persians from the narrow confines of materialism and to expose them to the vast potentials of the universe. More importantly, this would save them from the injustice and exploitation perpetrated against them in the name of religion. They would then be free to enjoy Islam's perfect justice and equality. It was for this reason that Rub'ī said that Allah had sent the Muslims to the unbelieving Persians.

The objective of raising up the Muslim community is to enjoin good and forbid evil. Enjoining good and forbidding evil is an important and universal dimension of Islamic faith. It concerns each and every aspect of life in this world. Muslims have been assigned this duty exclusively. This explains the superior position annexed by the Muslim community. Muslims are branded as the best community in view of the special mission they are to execute.

Messengers prior to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) were sent down as individuals. However the Prophet's advent was unique in that it also marked the evolution of the whole community. Their mission was identical with that of the Messengers. It must be clarified nonetheless that the community is not a Messenger unto itself. The Prophet Muḥammad's messengership was different

from that of other Messengers. After the Prophet disappeared from the public scene, Muslims carried out *Da'wah* work. However, they would not and could not deliver what the Prophet had accomplished. A Messenger is a distinguished person selected by Allah to convey His message. However, a whole community can be assigned the job of calling people to the way of truth. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) too, specified this role for Muslims, clarifying that they had and have a mission to accomplish. They have a distinct responsibility. They are there to facilitate, not to erect obstacles.

In sum, the Muslim community has a particular mission to implement. It has to carry out *Da'wah* work for the whole of mankind. All of its pursuits, be those related to culture and civilisation or to any other sphere of life should emanate from its belief system. All its activities should revolve around the same goal. For, the very purpose of its evolving is to enjoin good and forbid evil among mankind.

5. Enjoining good and forbidding evil

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ... ﴿١١٠﴾

You [true believers in Islam] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind. You enjoin good, forbid evil and believe in Allah.

(*Āl 'Imrān* 3:110)

Enjoining good is a wide-ranging assignment allotted especially to the Muslim community. What accounts for the supremacy of the Muslim community is its duty of performing this noble task. For this reason alone the Qur'ān speaks of Muslims as the best of people ever raised up for mankind. This is part of the larger task of *Da'wah* and preaching the true faith entrusted to Muslims. At the core of enjoining good is the concern to protect mankind from Hellfire. The purpose

of creation is to gain the gnosis of Allah, especially His excellent attributes. This can be done best when human society is purged of evil and adorned with virtues instead. The Qur'ān therefore promises prosperity and felicity for those engaged in enjoining good.

The Muslim community is obliged to carry forward the original assignment given to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). It is, therefore, responsible for spreading true faith. Its success rests on discharging this duty. If Muslims fail to perform this, they are liable to suffer huge losses. They would betray their incompetence. Rather, they would incur a serious charge. For if they do not discharge their basic duty, their accomplishments in other fields will not carry any weight. Every object in nature – birds, metals, minerals and elements – are best appreciated for their essential qualities. If they lack these, they are taken as worthless. It is pointless having something which does not perform its main function.

Today mankind is on the verge of collapse and ruin. This begs the question as to who will rescue our ailing humanity. All sections of society are equally afflicted. So is the state of man's beliefs, morals, social life, spiritual health, and faith. The malaise is on account of man's severing of his ties with Allah.

If Muslims abandon their duty of enjoining good, they will face serious problems and land themselves in utter humiliation and disgrace. They will be denied divine help. Their punishment will issue from the neglect of their basic duty. They will be held accountable for disregarding the very purpose for which they have been evolved. Their indifference to this duty will breed lethargy, evil and error. It will also result in mutual hostility and feuding, with devastating consequences. Ruin will loom large. Muslims will taste its fatal consequences, especially in the grand assembly on the Day of Judgement when they will be called to account.

Enjoining good and forbidding evil is an important, religious duty, to which are linked many religious issues. Muslims suffer from apathy towards faith. Their faith has grown weak. Their Islamic spirit has waned. Such weakness is on account of their abandoning faith,

particularly the religious duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

As a result of their dereliction of this duty, the whole of humanity has been suffering. While other unimportant works are attended to, this vital area of activity is neglected. For those entrusted with this responsibility are not seen to be performing their duty. Muslims have thus forfeited their exalted rank, and the benefits flowing from it.

The *Sharīʿah* places a premium on collective life, social reform and overall development. The Muslim community is likened to a single body. If one part of this body is in pain, the entire body becomes restless. For this reason, enjoining good and forbidding evil has been accorded the status of an important religious duty. Muslims should equip themselves to discharge this duty effectively. A community cannot attain progress unless its members adorn themselves with virtues and perfection. It is our bounden duty to accomplish the assignment of *Daʿwah* in a way that we grow in strength and so gain victories. Let us devote ourselves to recognising Allah and His Messenger. We must submit ourselves to Allah's commands. The duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil is a privilege, a trust passed on to us from the Messengers. Its only objective is not to reform others but to affirm our own servitude to Allah and to mend our ways. If we accomplish this job properly, we will be blessed with honour, peace and joy.

[III]
Faith

1. The Story of the seven firm believers

إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَٰهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٣﴾ وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ
قَامُوا۟ فَقَالُوا۟ رَبُّنَا رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ لَن نَّدْعُوَا۟ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ إِلَٰهًا لَّقَدْ
قُلْنَآ إِذًا شَطَطًا ﴿١٤﴾

They were young men who believed in their Lord. We increased them in guidance. And We made their hearts firm and strong when they stood up and said: Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Never shall we call upon any god other than Him. If we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity in disbelief.

(*al-Kahf* 18:13-14)

This story recounted in the Qur'ān may be entitled the account of seven firm believers. The story itself contains a special message and role model for youth of all time and place. It inspires both the heart and mind, motivating us by its simplicity. For it is a story of both tender feelings and firm conviction. The Qur'ānic account has rendered these young believers immortal in history. They stand out as

an example for the youth of our times. Certain basic truths of immense and abiding value are articulated in relating their account.

The story of the seven believers may be better understood in the light of the following backdrop. The Prophet Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) launched his mission of truth in the region presently known as Syria and Palestine, which was then part of the Roman Empire. Muslims look upon the Prophet Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) as a distinguished Messenger who called mankind to the doctrine of monotheism. Polytheism was then the order of the day, enveloping the whole world in its darkness. Jesus' message was the only ray of light in the all-pervading ignorance and error that bound society. He raised his voice against polytheism, racism, superstition, ritualism and injustice. His message rested on the planks of monotheism and God-consciousness. Some noble souls greeted his message enthusiastically, themselves becoming his faithful disciples. Some moved to various parts of the Roman Empire in order to invite people to truth. It is common knowledge that those senior in age generally refrain from joining any radical movement owing to the fetters of social customs, traditions and worldly considerations. They are too apprehensive of taking any bold step. In contrast, youth, who are not so constrained and who do not have such commitments to which the old ones are bound, enthusiastically accept a new message which strikes a chord in their hearts. The Qur'ān does not specify the ages of the youth in its account. This is just one stylistic feature of the Qur'ān. It makes generalised statements which hold good for everyone. In other words, Qur'ānic stories are marked by universalism. Regarding these seven, the Qur'ān says only this much that they were young people. The expressions used of them carries in the original Arabic connotations of someone young at heart, high-spirited, and radical in thought. Another important implication of the Qur'ānic expressions is that they were a handful of young men. Whenever the call to truth is made, only a few persons respond positively in the initial stage. Allah inspires and strengthens these brave souls to take up challenges.

In relating this story the Qur'ān brings to the fore a particular attribute of Allah – His Lordship. It is said: "*They were young men who believed in their Lord.*" The emphasis on this attribute is significant. For, at times, states or rulers lay claim to lordship under the false belief that it is they who provide sustenance to their subjects. This gives rise to a superstructure of false beliefs. People are forced into pledging loyalty to them so as to ensure their survival. They have to assure the rulers of their unquestioning loyalty. For, without their patronage they apprehend the loss of sustenance. The Qur'ān is very particular in its choice of expressions in a given context. These youths rose to the occasion in the heyday of the Roman Empire. This was the most organised, civilised and powerful empire of the day. It is also known for having passed on to posterity the heritage of Roman law. These youths had the audacity to challenge a superpower of the day under its very nose. They declared their allegiance to sound faith. By then Christianity had not been corrupted. Some early Christians, who were genuine disciples of the Prophet Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) had reached there. They proclaimed that God, not the state, provided for their sustenance. For they recognised the truth that only the Lord is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. They made this declaration when the Roman Empire and its subservient states used to control all means of livelihood. It reigned supreme in economic matters, disallowing any liberty to citizens. Such absolute power rested with the state that it appeared to be in control of everything. Common sense dictated that in such a setting these youths should have cooperated with the state in matters of faith. They should have been wise enough to conceal their profession of a faith which was at variance with state religion. Boldly, however, they dismissed the Greek and Roman mythology of the day which permeated life at that time. This mythology formed part of Roman culture and civilisation, its belief system and social life. The whole of society was given to superstitions, polytheism and whimsical notions. In Greece, Rome and ancient India, there were incarnations of God in the form of numerous gods and goddesses. Magnificent temples

were erected in commemoration of this plethora of idols. There were gods and goddesses of love, wealth, provisions, war, rain and of the whole range of phenomena. Yet these believing youth had the moral courage to dismiss this falsehood, asserting:

> *Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Never shall we call upon any god other than Him. If we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity in disbelief. These our people have taken for worship gods other than Allah. Why do they not bring for them a clear authority? And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against Allah?*
>
> (*al-Kahf* 18:14-15)

The Qur'ān makes it plain that it is man who is to take the initiative in matters of faith. This is followed by help and support extended by Allah. As these youth proclaimed their faith, Allah helped them attain more guidance. Obviously, Allah is the only source of all guidance. Guidance to truth cannot be obtained by dint of only one's intellectual faculty, written works, self study or library resources. The Qur'ān unambiguously ascribes guidance to Allah alone. Thanks to Allah's guidance, and subsequent increase in it, these youth scaled new heights in spiritual development. They submitted themselves wholesale to Allah, turned exclusively to Him, exerted themselves in gaining the gnosis of Allah in terms of His magnificent attributes and excellent names. As they engaged in these spiritually-oriented exercises, Allah enabled them to derive more and more guidance.

It is fallacious to think that man can achieve something of his own, without any effort. Man has to take the initiative and this is followed by the grant of divine help. The same happened with these youths, as the Qur'ān tells: "*We increased them in guidance. And We made their hearts firm and strong.*" For they were pitted against the superpower of the day. They had displayed their resolve and commitment to faith in having abandoned the state religion and declared their allegiance to divine faith.

This then is the story of the People of the Cave. In 1973, during my visit to Transjordan I had the privilege of visiting the cave in which these youth lie buried. Wafā' al-Dujjānī, a scholar and Director of Archaeology, Jordan, was kind enough to arrange for my visit there. He argued cogently why this spot in Jordan is to be taken as the cave which is referred to in the Qur'ān. History bears testimony to the fact that for centuries this event has been recorded and discussed. It has become part of literature and folklore. I have dealt with this event quite extensively elsewhere, in my book *Maʿraka-i Īmān wa Māddiyyat* (Encounter between Faith and Materialism). It emerges that most of these youths were sons of courtiers. Their families would have been loyal to the throne, and their immediate family members would have held important offices of the empire. This, however, complicated the issue. For the young men's stance could not be taken as a prank on the part of some non-serious youth. It was a firm case of opposition to state religion and of affirming a new faith. In sum, it amounted to rebellion. Their links with the leading and noble families of the empire posed a threat. Their actions placed their parents in peril, for the latter could be taken to task for not having prevented their off spring's behaviour. Being parents they could not easily disown their children. Rather, they had great expectations that their children would bring glory to them. The Qur'ān has elsewhere portrayed this psychological crisis confronting elders and young members of society. When the Prophet Ṣāliḥ (peace and blessings be upon him) presented his call to truth before his community, asking them to profess and practise monotheism, the elders told him with much pain that they held great expectations of him. Being a gifted young man he was supposed to bring laurels to his family. He was to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious ancestors. However, his call to the truth had raised all their hopes. For his mission put an end to their vested interests. They looked upon Ṣāliḥ as a promising man destined for worldly glory. His engagement with truth and monotheism, however, disappointed them.

The youths, as referred to in the story of the People of the Cave, constituted just a handful. It appears that they were no more than seven in number. Yet they had links with hundreds of people in terms of their family connections and friendship circles. All of them were at risk and were suspect in the eyes of the state. Being bright young men they were the centre of hope and promised prosperity for their kith and kin. Some might think that their small number would not have posed a problem. For the elimination of such a small number of youths would not have created any ripples. However, this was not an isolated case of just a few individuals. Their family networking was the issue. These seven youths had close family ties with at least seventy other people. The Qur'ān therefore cites it as a major event that affected society. Little is on record about the details of the persecution inflicted upon them. They must have been offered lucrative jobs if they recanted their new faith. It is likely that they were both tempted and harassed. Generally speaking, youth are more vulnerable to temptation. A saint who was exposed to both is reported to have said that temptation is very alluring in such circumstances. States often resort to both persecution and enticement. These youths confronted both yet they managed to resist. This was possible because Allah had made their hearts firm and strong. They were blessed with the spirit of sacrifice, self-control and perseverance.

Allah did a great favour to these youths in making their hearts firm and strong. Their commitment to God made them steady and consistent. As a result of divine help, nothing could distract them. For they had sincerely pledged their loyalty to their Lord Who is the Lord of all that is in the heavens and on earth. They were strengthened in their resolve on account of reposing their trust in Allah. They declared: "*Never shall we call upon any god other than Him. If we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity in disbelief. These our people have taken for worship gods other than Allah.*" They raised the pertinent question, addressed to the leading members of their community: "*Why do they not bring for them a clear authority?*" For it was beyond them as to why they had taken gods besides Allah,

without any grounds. To them it was a case of gross injustice and wrongdoing: "*And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against Allah?*"

Some salient points emerge from this story related in *Sūrah al-Kahf*. The first and foremost is that one should be unwavering in one's faith. One should profess faith insightfully, vigorously and confidently. One's faith in Allah and His attributes should be total and firm. This degree of faith should characterise every Muslim, the lay and the scholar alike.

We can gain further guidance if we maintain strong links with Allah. The sources of guidance in our case are the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, the Prophet's role model, the Companions and all those who strove for Islam. A study of these may reinvigorate us, just as a battery is recharged. We are constantly exposed to materialism, and come into contact with such people and things as make us oblivious of God. All that is around us drives us away from Him – be it television, radio, newspapers and even literature. It is generally held that literature is innocuous and neutral. However, in our times, it is no more than an agent of wickedness and promiscuity. It promotes falsehood, sexual anarchy and base desires. We are deluged by materialism. Our educational system, in particular, is responsible for such growing materialism. Amid this all-round degeneration it is quite a task to uphold faith and moral values.

As a precaution against this onslaught we should devote more time and energy to gaining more and more divine guidance, increase our faith, and put up a stiff challenge against base desires. Some token steps or rituals cannot help us withstand encroaching materialism. The challenges are so compelling and ruthless that without firm faith and without emulating role models we stand no chance of winning. It is time to brace ourselves with the help of steady faith.

2. The Initial Stage of Faith and *Da'wah*

وَاذْكُرُوٓا۟ إِذْ أَنتُمْ قَلِيلٌ مُّسْتَضْعَفُونَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ تَخَافُونَ أَن
يَتَخَطَّفَكُمُ ٱلنَّاسُ فَـَٔاوَىٰكُمْ وَأَيَّدَكُم بِنَصْرِهِۦ وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Remember when you were few and were reckoned weak in the land, and were afraid that men might kidnap you, but Allah provided a safe place for you, strengthened you with His help, and provided you with good things so that you might be grateful.

(*al-Anfāl* 8:26)

Allah reminds Muslims in the above passage of their small number and weakness in the early days of Islam. The Muslims being weak were persecuted. They lived then in constant fear of annihilation. It was then that Allah blessed Muslims with refuge and helped them as a special favour from Him. They were provided with good things which enabled them to thank Allah.

On studying the above against the backdrop of the early days of Islam, one can better appreciate life in Madīnah. On reading this, one is readily reminded of Dār al-Arqam and the valley of Abū Ṭālib. At Dār al-Arqam Muslims sought refuge against the persecution unleashed by the unbelieving Makkans. There they could remember Allah and mention His name in relative peace. They were free there to offer Prayers. It was there that many leading Companions declared their acceptance of Islam. To the best of my knowledge, 'Umar too embraced Islam there. In sum, Dār al-Arqam served as a refuge for early Muslims.

At the valley of Abū Ṭālib, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Companions had to take shelter when they were faced with social and economic boycott. The unbelieving

Makkans had stopped dealers from approaching Muslims for selling or buying anything. Thus, even the basic supply of food was denied to Muslims. However, some noble Makkans, at times, provided Muslims with food, and this helped them survive. Otherwise the unbelievers had planned the boycott for the extirpation of the early Muslim community. They were under a constant security check, especially insofar as this entailed denying them any access to the outside world. The Muslims of the day, who were no more than a few thousand, were told of the dangers confronting them. They were too weak to resist any attack. Even the Quraysh, a single Makkan tribe, could wipe them off the face of the earth. Significantly enough at this juncture, the Qur'ān employs the metaphor of extinguishing a light. The Muslims could easily be extirpated at any time and without much effort by their enemy. This passage thus holds out a mirror to ground realities.

However, Allah provided the Muslims with a safe place, strengthened them with His help and provided them with good things: "*Good things*" is a wide-ranging expression, including empire, power and authority, privilege, legislative power, freedom and liberty. What is important is that the Muslims were granted good things so that they might be grateful to Allah.

On reading the above passage, those familiar with *Sīrah*, Islamic history and the history of world religions, will think of Dār al-Arqam in the days of the worst persecution.

3. Bargaining for Faith

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا۟ وَجَٰهَدُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ ... ﴿٢١٨﴾

Those who have believed, and those who have migrated [for Allah's sake] and have strived hard in the way of Allah, all of them look forward to Allah's mercy.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:218)

The objective of all study, knowledge, worship, spiritual exercise and self-development is to gain firm faith. It is not however easy to attain such firmness of faith. If one is engaged wholly in mundane activities, economic pursuits, hobbies and daily routines, one is not likely to attain steady faith. This is not the divine dispensation. Allah does not bestow the blessing of faith on someone who does not strive for it. One has to be a genuine seeker of faith. Those not keen on attaining faith are naturally denied it. Seekers of truth undergo all sorts of hardship in their quest for truth. They work hard in this cause before gaining any success. Take the example of al-Ghazālī. He was a first-rate scholar whom Allah had blessed with erudition. Notwithstanding his lack of resources, he commanded respect for his scholarship. Yet he felt that he lacked firm faith. Therefore, he renounced his enviable worldly position in order to enhance his faith; in effect he renounced life and resolved not to return home until he had gained firm faith. Allah extended His help and guidance to al-Ghazālī. For this is the divine dispensation whereby those who strive in Allah's cause are shown the straight way. Allah granted him success in his quest for truth. Al-Ghazālī managed to attain what he was looking for. On his return home he was blessed with such firm faith that he was able to guide millions to the truth. Reading his account of his struggles one's faith grows.

The same holds true for Rūmī. He sensed he occupied a spiritual void and lamented his pretence for possessing knowledge. Outwardly he was, no doubt, a scholar, with remarkable skills. He had imbibed a whole body of knowledge by dint of his frequent visits to libraries. Yet he recognised the spiritual void he found himself in. For he was aware of the following *ḥadīth*. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) directed the believers: "You should worship Allah with the realisation that you watch Him." Likewise, when Gabriel asked the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to define *Iḥsān*, he replied: "You should worship Allah with the realisation that you watch Him. If this is not so, you should, at least, feel that He watches you."

Rūmī was also tormented by the same conditions as al-Ghazālī. Notwithstanding his preoccupation with religious education which involved the teaching of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, he nevertheless felt that he lacked firm faith. In particular, he felt he did not possess constancy of faith, concern for beliefs and a single-minded devotion to acts of worship.

This naturally raises the question as to how one should develop firm faith, trust in Allah and concern for one's own ultimate success. Essentially, it calls for the company of an accomplished spiritual master who can guide one to true conviction. Equally important is the type of ambience which provides relief for the sceptic. Or rather, that it should help him imbibe firm faith. When Rūmī came to know of the presence of a spiritual master in Delhi who was exceptionally good in training his disciples and orienting them towards faith, it was a dream come true for him. Restless at such news, he left for Delhi at the earliest opportunity, and was to spend the rest of his life at Shāh Ghulām ʿAlī's monastery. Engrossed in spiritual exercises there, he renounced all else. His sincere devotion was rewarded by Allah. For he became one of the illustrious disciples of Shāh Ghulām ʿAlī. The Shāh entrusted him with the task of carrying out moral development in Iraq, Kurdistan and Turkey. His efforts may be appreciated best in the light of this Qur'ānic passage: *A goodly word is as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches reach the sky, giving its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord.* (*Ibrāhīm* 14:24)

Rūmī's mission illustrates this passage from the Qur'ān so very aptly. For, two hundred years since his demise, Islam flourishes in the regions where he carried out his mission. All this is a result of his sincere intention which prompted him to call on Shāh Ghulām ʿAlī.

The Qur'ān declares that those who profess faith, migrate in Allah's cause. They abandon their homes and hearths, and strive hard in His way so that they may look forward to His mercy. Divine mercy, as used in the Qur'ān, represents absolute mercy, not restricted by time, place or any other constraint. It embraces knowledge, gnosis, conviction,

piety, doing good, gaining wide acceptance, endearing supernatural powers, help and support, reinforcement, domination and honour, as conferred by Allah on any of His servants. This passage also makes a pointed reference to Allah's mercy, which holds out the promise of greater hope for man. Divine mercy is not to be equated with the kindness and generosity of a fellow human being. It is common knowledge that the quantum of generosity varies with the status of the person displaying it. However, Allah's mercy is matchless. One cannot even speculate its quantum. Nor does it have any limit. Its depth, range and height are unknown. Allah may show as much mercy as He wills. Regarding the duty of fasting in Ramaḍān, Allah says: "Fasting is exclusively for Me. I will give reward for it." Allah knows best what reward He will confer. Those rewarded by Him will appreciate it best. Almost the same point is made in the passage under discussion about true believers that they look forward to His mercy. It is not specified as to what form His mercy will assume. One cannot speculate how Allah will reward individuals and communities. What is nonetheless certain is that those characterised by faith, *hijrah* (migration in Allah's cause) and *Jihād* (striving in Allah's way) will be entitled to receive His mercy. They deserve it. One who looks for this coveted reward should make himself eligible for it. Genuine seekers of Allah are helped. We have already cited the glorious examples of al-Ghazālī, Rūmī and the Prophet's Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

4. Defending Faith

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱصْبِرُواْ وَصَابِرُواْ وَرَابِطُواْ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

O believers! Endure and be patient. Guard your territory by stationing army units permanently at the places from where

the enemy can attack you. And fear Allah so that you may be successful.

(*Āl ʿImrān* 3:200)

Allah directs believers to bear with their condition by way of creating an ambience of perseverance, urging one another to be patient. Another directive is to defend their frontiers. This is rounded off with an exhortation of God-consciousness. They should do everything in the realisation that Allah is Omnipotent and All-Seeing. This will help them achieve success.

The first and foremost directive is patience. It is in the form of a command with which the address opens. Believers are asked to persevere. The Arabic expression *ṣabr* has changed its connotations over a long period of time. In Urdu, it has assumed yet more connotations. Furthermore, it is used in Urdu in a very narrow, restricted sense. Generally speaking, it is taken to mean that one should put up with a calamity, an injustice, pain or suffering, without complaint. In the original Arabic, however, *ṣabr* carries a wider range of meaning. It stands for constancy, consistency, an unwavering resolve and taking an uncompromising stand on one's principles.

In the above passage believers are asked both to be patient and to act with perseverance. These twin directives are worth studying. Patience alone does not suffice for communities in their struggle. Rather, there is a need for an atmosphere of perseverance, constancy, boldness and courage. This should characterise community life. Every individual should reinforce the other to be patient and persevering. A believer's entire way of life, his conviction, his perseverance, his ambition and resolve, his excellent conduct and his behaviour should be such as to boost others' morale and be a guide for everyone. His illustrious example should be a source of strength and inspiration for others. He should motivate the weak-hearted, exhorting them to take a firm stand. In sum, the ambience should be such that one should find it difficult to demoralise others. Any lack of spirit should be widely condemned. On being faced with doubt and scepticism, every believer should encourage others to adopt a firm stance.

The believers are told emphatically in the above passage to be patient. It is evident from Arabic idiom that the Qur'ānic expression used in this passage signifies one's personal conduct. The other expression is, however, related to the community as a whole. In other words, believers should be patient in their personal lives. At another level, they should urge perseverance, display the utmost endurance and tolerance and face situations courageously and in a manly fashion. Such a stance posits no weakness.

The believers should be consistent in their faith, beliefs and trust in Allah, and take only Him as the All-Powerful. They are instructed to create an ambience of perseverance. Their conduct at both personal and collective levels should display their ability to endure and persevere. The believing community should stand out above others for its perseverance. It should infuse others with a great power of resistance. For some strategic reason or while looking for divine help or in the larger interests of community and country this community may defer taking a decisive step. Yet it will strike later when the time is right. Yet this does not amount to any weakness on its part. Rather, all believers should be full of perseverance. They should impart the impression that they possess tremendous powers of resistance. They should be ready to take on their enemies, both from within and without. Notwithstanding their desire to wage a decisive battle, they must also exercise self-restraint in the public interest. They reckon with what suits their country. They are equally aware of the rights and interests of their neighbours. The evil emanating from violence and bloodshed prevents them from taking up arms. They are checked by their faith, their moral training and the role model provided by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and his Companions. Otherwise they would immediately plunge into the thick of the battlefield. They have tremendous capacity for action. History bears testimony that minority groups have often been successful. They can destroy country upon country, reducing vast empires to nothing more than rubble.

The Qur'ānic directive, nonetheless, is that they should do only that which is best for the community as a whole. The believers are guided in every respect by the Prophet's sayings and his *Sunnah*. Believers do not have absolute freedom to act as they like. Nor are they expected to act impulsively, provoked by the course of events. It is befitting for them instead to take steps in a controlled, self-restrained and wise way. They should take into consideration all the factors before committing themselves to action.

It is the miracle of the Qur'ān that the import of the passage under discussion appears to be addressed in particular to the Indian Muslims of our time. We are directed to be patient, persevere, and act with steadfastness even in the face of the communal carnage, frequent attacks, violence and bloodshed directed against us and all the injustice and apathy shown to us.

More importantly, we are instructed to defend our frontiers. The Qur'ān uses the expression *ribāṭ* which refers to a safe habitation. Believers are exhorted to live together in unity, giving the ambience of an invincible fortress to the enemy. They are to defend themselves against the enemy. What follows this is the best piece of advice one can obtain: "*Fear Allah*". This sets apart the directive from the comments of any military or political leader. A statesman or politician may, at most, harp at unity. However, the divine directive stands out for its moral tenor. Anyone else in this position may have preached tolerance and patience and insisted on displaying solidarity. However, Allah's directive is designed to transform man's morality. Accordingly, the believers are asked to become God-conscious. This is the feature of divine faith. In contrast, any man-made philosophy or "ism" is moulded by only ground realities and experiences. A leader succumbs to the aspirations of his people and presents a blueprint in line with their wishes. He does not leave any room for piety and moral values. Allah, nonetheless, exhorts Muslims to practise patience even in the face of the worst provocation, whether it be invasion, excess, or aggression. Even in such a situation Muslims are obliged to act with perseverance. They may be victims of an oppressor, indulging

in aggression, rape, and ill-treatment of the old and scholars. Such reports of injustice are fairly common. Yet believers should fear Allah and display patience. Generally speaking, in such a situation one thinks only of retaliation and of teaching the enemy a lesson. In taking revenge one hardly observes any limit. However, the *Sharī'ah* keep the believers in check in such a situation, asking them to fear Allah. They are told not to behave like their oppressors in exceeding the limits, in gratifying their animal instincts and in turning a blind eye to moral values and norms. Rather, they are bound by the limits set by Allah. Thus the above passage represents a detailed guidance for Muslims.

All Muslims believe in the Qur'ān, taking it as a miracle granted by Allah to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). We regard it as the Word of Allah. Let it also be realised that the Qur'ān is a miracle both in its whole and in its various parts. In other words, each and every Qur'ānic verse is a miracle in itself. Few recognise this truth, though it is generally believed that the Qur'ān is a miracle. Its miraculous features appear in different ages in a variety of ways. The Qur'ānic passage under study is a miracle in itself for its abiding message for us all.

It is hard to enumerate on how many occasions the Qur'ān has guided mankind, especially in a crisis. It has given Muslims a new impetus – spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally and collectively. If we imbibe the message of this verse, and if Allah blesses us with strength and inspiration, we may derive all the benefits from such Qur'ānic guidance. Rather, it would appear that the Qur'ān has been sent down in our times, specifically addressed to us.

5. The Position and Message of Muslims

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

Do not become weak [against your enemy], nor be sad. You will be superior, if you are true believers.

(*Āl ʿImrān* 3:139)

The above verse was revealed during the early days of Islam. Then the Islamic state was not in place. Islam was confined to the Arabian peninsula and the Arabs alone. The Arabs of the day led a life of extreme poverty. Their food usually consisted of dates, the flesh of camel and barley bread. Their dress was of coarse material and their houses of mud or bare tents. In the extreme cold they suffered badly from climatic rigours. The Qur'ān speaks of their miserable lot in the following passage which identifies their lack of resources and destitution: *And remember when you were few and were reckoned weak in the land, and were afraid that men might kidnap you.* (*al-Anfāl* 8:26)

In contrast to the Arabs, the Romans and Persians raked in luxury and affluence. They were the symbols of sophistication and refinement for the world and enjoyed a flourishing culture and civilisation. Between them, they ruled over the world. The east was under Persian hegemony and the west under Roman's. Their authority was massive. They had plenty of sustenance and exercised control over much of the earth's natural resources. Indeed, major parts of the world lay under their control and influence.

Against this backdrop of all-round darkness in the domain of faith, the Qur'ān threw out a challenge to both superpowers. It infused a new lease of life into the Arabs, assuring them: *Do not become weak [against your enemy] nor be sad. You will be superior, if you are true believers.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:139)

The Qur'ān challenged both the Makkan Quraysh and the Persian and Roman Empires. By way of comfort and consolation for the leader of the Muslim community, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), *Sūrah Yūsuf* was sent down. The *Sūrah* opens thus: "*In Joseph and his brethren there are signs for those who ask*," (*Yūsuf* 12:7). More important is the *Sūrah*'s concluding note:

> *When the Messengers gave up hope and thought that they were denied [by their people], then there came to them Our help, and whoever We willed was rescued. And Our punishment cannot be warded off from the wrongdoers. Indeed in their stories there is a lesson for men of understanding. The Qur'ān is not some forged statement but the confirmation of [Allah's Books] which were before it and a detailed explanation of everything and a guide and mercy for the believing people.*
>
> (*Yūsuf* 12:110-111)

In the same vein is the following passage from *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*. It changed the scene, putting an end to injustice and oppression:

> Ṭā. Sīn. Mīm. *These are the verses of the manifest Book. We recite to you some of the news of Moses and Pharaoh in truth, for a people who believe. Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people sects, oppressing a group among them by killing their sons and sparing their daughters. He was one of the oppressors. And We wanted to do a favour to those who were weak in the land and to make them rulers and inheritors, and to establish them in the land. We let Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts receive from them that which they feared.*
>
> (*al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:1-6)

In the given conditions of the day, the nascent Muslim community did not have a chance. It was unthinkable that a handful of weak, resourceless and oppressed Muslims would ever emerge as a formidable community. Even the most insightful person could not predict such

a turn of events. No one could assure themselves that they would ever be superior.

Qur'ānic assurance to the contrary, however, boosted the morale of Muslims, infusing into them such a spirit that they took on boldly the superpowers of the day. They were undaunted by the latter's glory and grandeur. The Qur'ān projects the hollowness of these empires thus: *And when you look at them, their bodies please you; and when they speak, you listen to their words. They are blocks of wood propped up.* (*al-Munāfiqūn* 63:4)

Taking great pride in their new faith – Islam – these believing Arabs marched out, not in the least overawed by the mighty empires of Rome or Persia. Rather, they destroyed those superpowers of the day. The whole world was awestruck by their bravery, their commitment to Islam and their simplicity. They emerged not only as conquerors but also as the saviours of mankind. For their aim was to liberate mankind from the injustice, oppression and exploitation which had been perpetrated for centuries. As they invited people to serve and worship the One True God and freed them from the shackles of fellow human beings, they accomplished their mission. They asked men to move out from the narrow confines to the vastness of the Islamic order. They advised people to put an end to the abuse of religion committed by the clergy. So doing, they were not afraid of anyone. Worldly power and glory did not dampen their spirit. They regarded contemporary rulers, who paraded themselves as mighty emperors, no more than puppets. They had no difficulty therefore in crushing them. They razed the skyscrapers of their time to the ground. Nor were they daunted by such a huge enemy army. For they knew that the unbelievers lacked essential faith and moral values. Without professing faith in Allah, man is no better than an animal, rather he is a beast.

The Qur'ān instructed the illiterate Arabs in culture and civilisation, emboldened and inspirited them. They were conferred with a new message which boosted their self-confidence and pride, self-knowledge, higher ideals and purpose in life. They gained the ability

of discernment. They were energised in a way that they conquered the entire world. Empire-building, however, was not their concern. Their objective was to guide humanity then lost in the darkness of error and to preach the Oneness of God to fellow human beings. They wanted everyone to enjoy peace, justice and equality as envisaged by Islam.

Today there are more than fifty Muslim countries. We must then enjoy greater pride and confidence than the Arabs of early Islam. However, we do need to remind ourselves of the Qur'ānic promise: "*Do not be weak [against your enemy], nor be sad. You will be superior, if you are true believers.*" (*Āl 'Imrān* 3:139) When this verse was sent down, the Arabs did not have any state. They did not have any organised, life even within the Arabian peninsula. Islam had been present for about a decade and was in its infancy. Yet Allah addressed these Arabs in the above words, conferring upon them superiority. Are Muslims today not fit to receive the same Qur'ānic honour? The flags of more than fifty Muslim countries are hoisted at UN headquarters. We are not of course a nuclear power. We lag behind in science and technology. Regrettably, on account of our lethargy, inaction, disunity and non-observance of Islamic teachings we are not of the requisite standard. We excel the early Arabs, nonetheless, in the sense that we have many more Muslim states whereas the Arabs did not have a state at all. Are we then not entitled to what the Qur'ān promises: "*Do not be weak [against your enemy], nor be sad. You will be superior, if you are true believers.*"

Faith is the main asset of believers. On the day of the Battle of Badr, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) made this comment: "O Allah! If You let this handful of believers perish, no one will worship You on the face of the earth until the Last Day." The Prophet realised the need for repentance. Allah had blessed him with special intelligence. He was bestowed with discerning abilities. Had power or large numbers been the deciding feature, the Muslims would have stood no chance of survival or success. At the Battle of Badr only three hundred and thirteen Muslims were pitted against a well-equipped one thousand strong army. By any standard such a

numerically disadvantaged group could not overpower its adversary. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), however, turned with hope and fear to Allah and supplicated: "O Allah! If You let this handful of believers perish, no one will worship You until the Last Day."

If we take pride in Islam and pledge ourselves fully to faith, Allah will extend us help and support. He will protect us and take care of us. Allah has promised this. It goes without saying that He never makes a false promise: "*If you help Allah, He will help you and make your feet firm.*" (*Muḥammad* 47:7) On the contrary, if we are nominal Muslims, lacking the spirit of Islam, Amīr Shakīb Arsalān's remark on the League of Nations will be applicable to us in equal degree: "The League of Nations is only in name, without any substance." If we are devoid of faith, it will be our great loss and misfortune. We cannot expect any divine help or support in such a case. Allah only values true faith. He appreciates and rewards true believers, a point eloquently made in the above passage.

6. True followers of the Islamic Faith

مِّنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا۟ مَا عَٰهَدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَمِنْهُم مَّن قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُۥ وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَنتَظِرُ ۖ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا۟ تَبْدِيلًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Among the believers are men who are true to their covenant with Allah. Of them some have fulfilled their obligations and some of them are still waiting, but they have never changed in the least.

(*al-Aḥzāb* 33:23)

The above Qur'ānic verse captures the essence of the believers' covenant with Allah. It signifies the Islamic movement, the call to truth and the believers' unwavering and single-minded commitment

to Islam. Implicit in it is also the assertion that the believers are ever ready to sacrifice all that they have for this cause. Reading this one recalls the history of Islam, especially of the early days.

This verse stands out as a glowing tribute to the accomplishments of those who strove for the cause of Islam. For it makes a pointed reference to the believers' covenant and presents a role model for Muslims until the Last Day. It spells out the role of Muslims, their obligations to their Lord, and their assignments. One learns as to what entitles believers to receive divine bounties and what makes their deeds acceptable in His sight. The verse further offers a concise definition of Islam to believers, as it reminds them of their covenant with Allah.

Among the many millions of Muslims, some are specified in the above verse as being believers with firm resolve. This refers to such pious and noble souls who firmly believe in Allah's promise and who display their total commitment in His cause. Praise is heaped on them for their discharging their obligations to Allah. Then mention is made of those among them who have completed their appointed term and returned to Allah. They will be lavishly rewarded. Their reward in the Next Life will be unending. Those still alive look forward to divine rewards and are true to their covenant. They have not changed their commitment in any degree.

As already stated, the verse under study provides a concise definition of Islam. Early Muslims followed this standard. Accordingly it presents the role model valid until the Last Day. Allah sanctioned this example. Islam does not consist of the mere verbal uttering of its credal statement. One reciting it will, no doubt, be taken as a Muslim. For no one can contest his faith. We are bound to love and respect everyone who recites Islam's credal statement. Yet Islam goes far beyond this. A Muslim born as a Muslim must follow all the Islamic rituals. More important, however, is his commitment to his covenant with Allah. The pledge is that a Muslim will lead his whole life in accordance with Allah's commands. For He is the Creator and Sustainer of all, able to benefit and harm everyone. Only He can

honour or disgrace someone. He does whatever He wills and is the Supreme Master.

Islam's credal statement: "There is no god besides Allah" also represents a pledge. One uttering it testifies, both in word and deed, that Allah alone is the Creator and Regulator of the whole universe. All creation and commands are His. He has not abandoned the universe after having created it. Nor has He delegated authority to anyone. Man is asked to try his best and make the most of the opportunities available to him. He may utilise properly or abuse the resources put at his disposal. Allah is the Absolute Master of all that exists. Not a leaf falls without His leave. Nor can anyone move an inch unless He approves it. No change is admissible without His sanction. One's fate cannot be altered. Nor can the destiny of a people undergo any change unless He decides so.

Islam is essentially a covenant. Muslims are obliged to fulfill it. We must take Allah as the Creator and Regulator of this universe. We must recognise only Him as the Master of the universe. We must concede that our fate is decided by Him in that He alone can confer benefits or inflict loss upon us. We must vow not to surrender to anyone other than Him. Nor should we invoke anyone besides Him for meeting our needs.

As already indicated, Islam is synonymous with a pledge. It is to be seen how many of us are true to this pledge, for men are liable to forget their oaths. We must remind ourselves of the glorious examples of the Prophet's Companions. After professing Islam they cared little about their lives. Nor did they stick to false notions of honour and glory. They paid no heed to the praise or criticism of fellow human beings. Their only concern was their loyalty to Islam.

Muslims must appreciate this truth, especially in our turbulent times. Allah has blessed us with the bounty of Islam. He has done us an immense favour. Our verbal profession of Islam is meaningless. We may bear Muslim names and our way of life may contain some Islamic elements. We may occasionally visit the mosque. Our main duty as believers, nonetheless, is to be true to our pledge to Allah.

As Muslims we should pose a challenge to our surroundings. In our beliefs, acts of worship, conduct, dealings, way of life, social relations, marital ties, family and neighbourhood relationships and in every human activity we must behave as Muslims. Our commitment must be to divine laws. In every respect we should be governed by Allah's commands, even if this entails the loss of all of our belongings, assets and earnings, reducing us to utter destitution. Islam has nothing in common with nationalism. Nor is it specific to any particular culture. Islam does not recognise the nominal acceptance of some people of its faith. Regrettably this is the grim reality today.

Essentially, Islam is a covenant with Allah made publicly by believers. The only thing we find decisive and appealing is that which is endorsed by Allah and His Messenger. We are bound to the Prophet Muḥammad's elucidation of faith. We are committed to the will of Allah and of His Messenger. By the same token, we must emulate the Prophet's role model. We should always be mentally prepared for the loss of our property and lives. At times our loyalty to Islam may land us in serious trouble. Conditions vary from one country to another. Yet Muslims should adhere fast and firm to their faith. We may be treated as disloyal citizens in a Godless country, with the doors to education and employment shut on us. Economic avenues may be denied to us. Yet even in the face of such persecution we must act only on the commands of Allah and His Messenger.

Allah brands as true believers among Muslims those who are true to their covenant. The Qur'ān speaks highly of the truthful people. They draw accolade for their sincere and total commitment, free from any hypocrisy. Allah the Most Honourable bestows a high rank upon such. It is the highest honour imaginable for man. Overjoyed at this exaltation, these true believers had no hesitation in giving away their belongings and sacrificing their lives for His sake. They displayed their sincerity to their covenant and did not budge by even an inch.

On studying the condition of today's Muslims let us ascertain how faithful they are to their covenant. Muslims today are concerned only

about their petty, material interests, their worldly gains and losses, their political and economic pursuits, their pecuniary prospects, their safety and security and their status in public life. Such insubstantial things are dear to them. Allah attaches no importance to these. The Qur'ān talks about true believers, some of whom have passed away. They attained martyrdom, shedding every drop of their blood in Allah's cause. Some true believers are alive amongst us today. Allah has not ordained their death. Notwithstanding their active participation in *Jihād* and conquest some were not martyred. Take the example of Khālid ibn Walīd. He fought valiantly in numerous battles. He led the Muslim army to victory in many encounters. Yet Allah let him survive. Some no doubt, were killed in His way as their term had come to an end. Some attained martyrdom on the battleground while others breathed their last in their homes. Their devotion to *Da'wah* was total, as they preached Islam wherever they went, be it their home town or battleground. They spent their lives, looking forward to their return to Allah. There was not the slightest shift in their devotion to Allah and Islam.

The Qur'ānic passage cited above provides the role model for all of us. If I am asked, about a code of conduct and a way of life for Muslims I will definitely prescribe the same role model which is outlined in this passage.

Islam does not stand for a token professing of faith. Leading one's life like a Muslim does not represent Islam either. Rather, Islam signifies our covenant with Allah Who is Omnipresent, All-Hearing, Who knows the Unseen and is the Creator of all the worlds. As Muslims we are obliged to prefer the *Sharī'ah* to local customs. We must however exercise self-restraint in practising the *Sharī'ah*. *Sharī'ah* commands should guide us in every respect. Allah confers the title of "true believers" on the Companions and some Muslims of the early days. Yet this designation is valid for all times. Whoever is true to the covenant and discharges his obligations towards Allah may be taken as a "true believer". This is the only way out for us. True believers should be our role models and our understanding of Islam

must be: "There is no god besides Allah." We are bound to place a premium on all the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Messenger, and we should turn to Him alone for any gain or loss.

Islam originated from Allah and His Messenger. It encompasses articles of faith, acts of worship, marriage and burial rituals, inheritance, marital ties and links with neighbours. It is an all-embracing faith.



[IV]

Devotional Worship

1. Faith – An All-Embracing Entity

ٱلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ ٱلْإِسْلَٰمَ دِينًا ... ﴿٣﴾

This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:3)

The above verse was revealed during the *'Aṣr* Prayer on a Friday at 'Arafāt during the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) lived for less than three months after its revelation. Authentic reports indicate that a Jew told 'Umar that had the above verse been addressed to the Jews, they would have commemorated it as an important day in the life of the community. To this 'Umar replied "Yes, it has been sent down on a memorable day – Friday and the day of pilgrimage." Indeed it is a historic verse which will be celebrated until the Last Day.

Reference is made in the verse to the perfection of religion. The expression employed suggests that it is perfect in every respect, without admitting any addition or deletion. Nor is there any need for such alteration. Islam is a perfect, all-inclusive faith for its adherents and caters for all of their needs.

Let it be realised that faith is a complete entity. It is a whole, not some part. Included in faith are beliefs, deeds, acts of worship, transactions, and obligations towards both Allah and fellow human beings. Faith obliges a Muslim to say Prayers five times a day and also to distribute his inheritance as specified by the Qur'ān.

Addressing Muslims Allah tells them that He has completed His favour to them. Of His numerous favours, the most valuable was the bestowal of faith. For it is Allah alone Who guides one to faith. Man cannot attain this blessing: *They regard as a favour to you [O Muḥammad] that they have embraced Islam. Say: Count not your Islam as a favour to me. No, but Allah has conferred a favour upon you that He has guided you to faith, if you indeed are true.* (*al-Ḥujurāt* 49:17)

Allah blesses man with faith. Otherwise, there have been many intelligent and knowledgeable persons in every age who did not attain faith. Notwithstanding their sharp intellect, they could not realise this obvious truth. It is worth noting that the parents and offspring of many Messengers did not embrace faith. The most glaring examples are of the Prophet Noah's son and the Prophet Abraham's father. Muslims should therefore rejoice in the blessings of faith conferred upon them. Allah gave this immense favour to the Companions and to every Muslim born until the Last Day.

Allah's favours are numerous. Not only did He bestow Islam on us, He also helped us discern Him, ensured we did not bow to false, worthless gods and imbued us with a purpose in life. He has enabled us to prepare ourselves for our ultimate end and to defend ourselves against loss in the Hereafter. This, in turn, has entitled us to receive His bounties in both worlds. The Qur'ān draws our attention to this truth: *And remember Allah's favour on you, for you were enemies, one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that by His grace, you*

became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you that you may be guided. (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:103)

When the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) made the same point in his address to the *Anṣār* (the Madīnan Muslims) they exclaimed: "Undoubtedly, Allah and His Messengers have done a big favour for us."

That Allah has chosen Islam as the religion for Muslims is elaborated upon at another place in the Qur'ān: *O Believers! Fear Allah as He should be feared. And die not except in the state of Islam.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:102)

On their deathbeds the Prophets Abraham and Jacob (peace and blessings be upon them) said these words to their heirs: *O my sons! Allah has chosen for you the true religion, then die not except in the faith of Islam.* (*al-Baqarah* 2:132)

Only if we lead our lives as Muslims, may we die in the state of Islam. It goes without saying that none of us knows when we will die. We must therefore, always be in the state of Islam so that when death overtakes us, we are Muslims. For this it is essential that our beliefs, our customs, our social lives and our surroundings be Islamic: *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:85)

Against this backdrop the Qur'ān proclaimed: *This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.* (*al-Mā'idah* 5:3)

The message is loud and clear: in our beliefs, morals and manners, social lives and culture and civilisation we must be guided by the Qur'ān. Our social lives should not betray any imitation of the Western way of life. Allah has blessed us with a complete set of beliefs and a way of life governing our social and cultural life. We must follow this, irrespective of time and place.

2. In the name of Allah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

In the name of Allah Who is Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.

(*al-Fātiḥah* 1:1)

As Muslims all of us are familiar with *basmalah* and know when it is recited. However, we pay scant attention to the message embodied in this Qur'ānic formula. On commencing anything important, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), his Companions, *'Ulamā'* and pious souls first recited *basmalah*. In our daily lives we see and hear saints and religious figures reciting it on every opportune occasion: for example before they start their meal. The same holds true for every deed. In uttering this formula a Muslim takes the name of Allah. The point worth noting is the selection of a particular divine name in this formula. For Allah has many names. The Qur'ān asserts that all excellent names belong to Allah. Some of His names include: *al-Jabbār* (Almighty), *al-Qahhār* (the Subduer), *al-Qawī* (All-Powerful), and *al-Qādir* (Able to do anything). We know that He is Most Glorious, Perfect and Most Beautiful. Yet we are instructed to use a particular name of His as we commence an act. In the standard formula these two divine names are *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*. The references being to His Compassion and His Mercy.

Islam orients man to a mindset whereby of all the divine attributes he should constantly bear in mind that Allah is Most Compassionate and Most Merciful are the key. Muslims must realise that all their actions are being watched by Allah Who is the embodiment of mercy and compassion. Significantly enough, no reference is made in the formula to His power, glory and might. Rather, the focus is on His attributes of mercy and compassion. This is to make man realise that he is being nurtured and supported by the One Who is immensely

kind to us. Mercy and compassion are His outstanding features. This should orient our lives in a particular way. We should imbibe the message that our Lord Who provides us with everything that we need is full of mercy and compassion.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is on record as directing that Muslims should strive to develop divine attributes. In their character building men should give priority to the two features of mercy and compassion. This note is to the fore in the opening *sūrah* of the Qur'ān – *al-Fātiḥah.*

Take also the example of the *adhān*, to which we often listen. Few people, however, give any heed to the message of the *adhān.* Too much familiarity, at times, obstructs one from gaining such full understanding. The message of the *adhān* is: All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds and Cherisher of all that exists. He does not provide sustenance to a particular country, society, caste, class or section of people. Rather, He is the Lord of all the worlds, galaxies and solar systems. Everything flourishes, thanks to His mercy and compassion. We are accordingly instructed to be kind to one another, to maintain a brotherly and sisterly attitude, to help those in need and to share others' sorrows and sufferings. This we should do, realising that Allah is Most Compassionate and Most Merciful. We should emulate these divine attributes and pattern our lives in accordance with these.

3. One's Entire life as an act of worship

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٦٢﴾ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَبِذَٰلِكَ أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٦٣﴾

Say [O Prophet]: Verily, my Prayer, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. He has

no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of Muslims.

(*al-Anʿām* 6:162-163)

First, let us form a clear picture of worship. Worship consists in doing something to win Allah's pleasure, in line with His command, and to earn His reward. Going by this definition, every action done to please Allah is an act of worship. Nonetheless, it should be in accordance with His command and conform to the *Sharīʿah*. The same holds true for the observance of the *Sunnah*. If one emulates some authentic *Sunnah* in the hope of winning Allah's reward and reposing trust in His promise, this constitutes an act of worship. This feature is the essence of worship. Without this even an apparently noble deed is devoid of its spirit and is no more than a hollow ritual performed for the gratification of one's base self.

Allah asks Muslims that their Prayer, their rituals and their life and death should only be for His sake. For He is the Lord of the worlds.

During the period of humanity's decline and degeneration men fell prey to mythology. Allah had not prescribed any mythology. However, under the evil influence of polytheistic people and while committing corruption in faith, people invented a whole set of gods and goddesses. They also entertained an absolutely false belief that while some devotional acts of worship are for God, they are otherwise free to lead their lives as they wish. They may follow any law and act in a way which suits them best. They are not bound to please God in their daily lives. They divided life into two compartments – the holy and the secular. One should give unto God what is His and unto Caesar what is his. Thus they caused a division in religion. Such a division is inherently biased against God, allocating Him a proportion which is too small. Since man is given mostly to worldly activities, it left no room for activities devoted to God. Man is naturally afraid of a visible, palpable authority. He feels the urgency to please those in power. This is a purely materialistic outlook.

As a result of this narrow outlook, Christianity, the last major faith prior to Islam was restricted to the narrow area of some rituals and acts of worship. Materialism, love of wealth and lust for power replaced religion as man's main concern. The Christians were free to act as they liked notwithstanding their adherence to Christianity. They were naturally drawn towards all that which was in their own interests. This dealt a severe blow to religion, relegating it to the periphery. Few Christians today visit church, and that too, only on Sundays. During their brief visit to church they are asked only to observe some rituals of sitting and listening to church fathers and the music there performed. In the rest of their lives they do not have to observe any restrictions prescribed by their religion. They have unbridled freedom in both their public and private lives.

However, Islam transformed the situation under the Prophet Muḥammad's leadership. Man's entire life was devoted to obeying Allah. Obedience to Allah dictated each and every action and aspect of life. One should surrender oneself wholly to Him. Nothing belongs to false gods. Man is free to eat and drink as long as he does not partake of forbidden things. Before doing anything one should ensure that one's action is in accord with Allah's commands. Then one should seek Allah's pleasure through one's actions. This will orient one's entire life to the way prescribed by Him.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) eloquently preached the substance of this Qur'ānic verse in directing people to devote their piety, sacrifice and lives to Allah. Noble souls do indeed accomplish this task of dedicating themselves wholly to Allah. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is its illustrious example. This message is recorded in the Qur'ān so that Muslims until the Last Day get this message and emulate it. A Muslim's prayers, his acts of worship, his piety, his likes and dislikes and his life and death should be for Allah, the Lord of the worlds, exclusively.

Let it also be borne in mind that Allah does not have any partner. All acts of worship are for Allah alone. For He is without any associate. One's single-minded devotion to Him should correspond with the

Oneness of Allah. One's entire life should be wedded to the goal of winning Allah's pleasure. One's life should stand out for servitude to Allah.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was directed to lead life in this fashion and he readily followed this model in that he was a perfect believer.

The above-quoted verses are thus comprehensive in their meaning, outlining a code of conduct which is valid until the Last Day.

4. The Impact of Prayer on morals and conduct

إِنَّ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ ٱلْفَحْشَآءِ وَٱلْمُنكَرِ ... ﴿٤٥﴾

Prayer, no doubt, forbids one from obscenity and evil.
(*al-ʿAnkabūt* 29:45)

Prayer is effective against ill-manners, evil, obscenity and lust. It is next only to the credal statement of Islam in transforming one's outlook on life. For prayer reorients one completely. It fills man's heart with a new quest, seeking spiritual joy. As a result, one keeps away from all that is obscene and evil and instead turns to noble goals. One is fired by the dictates of faith. Consequently, one finds it revolting to indulge in disbelief, wickedness or disobedience of Allah.

These advantages will, however, accrue only when one offers prayer in a genuine spirit. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) advised Muslims: "You should worship Allah in a way as if you watch Him. Or else you should have the feeling that He watches you." Prayer offered with this realisation instils in one a new life, energy and warmth.

Prayer should be characterised by devotion to Allah. The one offering prayer should realise that he watches Allah. If one is unable to develop this perception, one should, at least, bear in mind that

one is being watched by Allah. Above all, prayer should keep one away from obscenity and evil. Obviously, it should deter one from sin as well. If one continues indulging in sin, driven by one's base self, one's prayer cannot be taken as perfect. However, if one shuns sin owing to one's engagement with prayer, this reflects the efficacy of prayer.

One should be particular about saying prayer, for it keeps one further away from sin. One offering prayer in its real spirit is drawn towards the remembrance of Allah. Moreover, it prompts one to do some thorough soul-searching.

To substantiate the point, attention may be drawn to the Qur'ānic account of the Prophet Shu'ayb (peace and blessings be upon him) and his community. When the Prophet Shu'ayb (peace and blessings be upon him) invited his community to monotheism, piety and a clean way of living, and warned them against the evil consequences of committing injustice, denying others their due and cheating in weights and measures, they scrutinised the Prophet's life. They discovered that prayer had made him an altogether different person. His concern for the lawful and unlawful, goodness, obedience to Allah and refraining from sin stemmed from his offering prayer. They pointedly asked him whether prayer forbade him from indulging in wrongdoing.

One thus learns that prayer produces and develops virtues, keeps one away from indecency and sin. This is illustrated by the conduct of the Prophet Shu'ayb's community. They recognised the good influence extended by prayer.

5. The Excellence of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾
الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾ مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ
نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾ اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ
أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are Allah's, the Lord of the worlds, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. The only Owner of the Day of Recompense. You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help. Guide us to the Straight Way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray.

(*al-Fātiḥah* 1:1-7)

Sūrah al-Fātiḥah is a marvellous example of the miracle that the Qur'ān is. Were all the best minds of the world, belonging to the realms of literature, psychology, ethics and spirituality, to produce a piece which could cater for all sections and classes of people and which could express their innermost wishes in their devotional worship, they would not have been able to compose anything similar to *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* in its beauty, conciseness and effectiveness. Regarding this particular *Sūrah*, the Qur'ān says: *And indeed We have bestowed upon you the seven oft-repeated verses [i.e. Sūrah al-Fātiḥah] and the grand Qur'ān.* (*al-Ḥijr* 15:87)

The opening verse of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*: "All praise and thanks are Allah's," is a comprehensive statement celebrating His glory. The words are so pithy and apt that they cannot be adequately translated into another language. Praise is the means through which Allah's grateful and loyal servant commences his invocation and presents his plea. The one offering prayer and reciting this *sūrah* realises that the Lord

praised by him and whom he is worshipping is not a god of any specific tribe, family, community, country or ethnic race. Rather, He is the Lord of all the worlds.

This article of the Islamic faith strikes a deadly blow against all the false, man-made divisions of humanity. A Muslim firmly believes in unity. Peace in society is contingent upon professing belief in the Oneness of Allah. On this plank Islam seeks to restructure human society. For it proclaims the Oneness of the Creator of the human species and of the common origin of mankind. So doing, it rejects all the divisions of mankind on the basis of religion, colour, caste or whatever. God is alone and irrespective of caste or colour He has joined mankind through brotherly ties. That He is the Lord of the universe cannot be contested by anyone. All men are the children of the Prophet Adam (peace and blessings be upon him), as the Qur'ān specifies:

> *O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person [Adam] and from him, He created his wife [Eve] and from them both He created many men and women. And fear Allah through Whom you demand [your mutual rights] and [do not cut the relations of] the wombs [kinship]. Surely, Allah is ever a watcher over you.*
>
> (*al-Nisā'* 4:1)

And:

> *O mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is he who has piety. Verily Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.*
>
> (*al-Ḥujurāt* 49:13)

The above verse is elucidated thus by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in his sermon:

> Allah has removed from you the prejudice of *jāhiliyyah* and taking pride in your ancestors. Now there exist only two types of people – pious Muslims or the unfortunate

> wicked, sinners. All men are children of Adam and Adam was created from clay. No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab. Excellence lies only in piety.
>
> (*Tirmidhī*)

One offering prayer is fully conversant with divine attributes. Of these one mentions first His mercy and compassion. These are apt attributes in the context. For during prayer a Muslim worships Allah with devotion, concentration, repentance and recounts before Allah his needfulness and helplessness. In such a setting he expects to receive divine blessings. He does not despair of His mercy.

He then recalls the Day of Judgement when Allah will be the sole Master. His power and authority will be displayed in full glory on that day. No one, be he an emperor or from among the super rich, will dare make any presentation to Allah. On that day Allah alone will exercise His authority. (*al-Mu'min* 40:16) A Muslim should bring to mind the Hereafter which renews his faith. The concern for the Hereafter fills his heart with piety and his fear of accountability. A Muslim is deluged by worldly temptations. He stands in need of firm conviction. This is followed by his affirmation that he turns only to Allah for worship and for every help and support. This point is made forcefully and eloquently in the next verse.

Prayer is full of worship and invoking Allah's help. It forges the right relationship between man and God. If one turns only to Allah in worship for meeting one's needs, this puts an end to all forms of polytheism and Godlessness. A Muslim states and renews this affirmation five times a day before Allah. The materialistic life is, no doubt, full of distractions, weakening man's relationship with God and his trust in Him. Man must then be cautious on these counts.

He then invokes Allah to guide him to the straight way. Divine guidance is man's basic need. This alone can help him enter Paradise. One who is denied it cannot attain any abiding success. In contrast, one blessed with it bears every loss cheerfully. Seeking divine guidance is innate in human nature. Man is instinctively drawn towards it.

However, divine guidance can be derived only by those who are consistent in good deeds. One may be inspired also by the living role models of pious souls acting on divine guidance. These noble figures are known in history as Messengers of God, the truthful ones, martyrs and the pious. According to the Qur'ān, they are blessed by Allah. The Qur'ān and all the earlier Scriptures urge the common people to follow in the footsteps of these noble souls, to nurture love and respect for them. The Qur'ānic advice is: *They are the ones guided by Allah. So follow them.* (*al-Anʿām* 6:90)

By the same token, the Qur'ān asks man to shun those who have deviated from the way of divine guidance and taken to the path of ingratitude, gratification of the self and self-destruction. They are guilty of rebellion and thus incur Allah's wrath. They stand condemned for their tampering with divine faith, acting with extremism in matters of religion and corrupting their scriptures. They lead a life full of error and ignorance: *Guide us to the Straight Way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray.* (*al-Fātiḥah* 1:6-7)

The above extract is a weighty testimony to the miracle of the Qur'ān. For it encapsulates the history of world religions. Were one to study the Qur'ān objectively one marvels at how an unlettered person, like the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), who had spent his entire life confined to the Arabian peninsula, was made to divulge historical truths. For the followers of the Prophet Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) are branded in the *sūrah* as those who went astray. Historians are bound to bear out the veracity of the Qur'ān regarding this reality.

A few words now about the expressions used in the *sūrah*. Generally speaking, the original words lose their impact and effectiveness in translation. Time also plays havoc with words. Some Arabic words which have found their way into Urdu have lost their original sense. *Ḍalālah* is one such word. In its original sense it refers to corruption in faith and deeds, deviation and misperception. In Urdu, however, these connotations are not found in it.

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) had not studied the history of Christianity. He had no access to its history. For only a few days he had been to Syria and had a very brief meeting, lasting for some minutes, with a Christian scholar. Yet Allah made him proclaim that the Jews are the ones who have incurred Allah's wrath and that the Christians are those who have gone astray. This statement of historical truth demonstrates the divine origin of the Qur'ān. A clear distinction is maintained between the Jews and the Christians.

It is evident from Jewish history that the Jews incurred divine wrath. Throughout history they have exerted an evil influence on morals, manners, attitudes and society. They are notorious for their intrigues and conspiracies. Their rebellion against God has been part of their national history. As a result, they were denied divine blessings. The Qur'ān makes a pointed reference to their having incurred Allah's wrath.

It must be said to the credit of the Qur'ān that it brands Christians as the ones in error. This description befits them in view of their deviation from the straight way. They have drifted further away from the truth down the millennia. Rather, they have rushed headlong to the way of error. Present-day Christianity bears no correspondence with the original faith. It is after all Pauline Christianity.

6. The Message of Ramaḍān

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

O Believers! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become pious.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:183)

The above Qur'ānic verse lays down that fasting is a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims. Until the Last Day the command embodied in this verse remains valid. Embedded in the verse is thus much food for thought.

First, the command is addressed to believers. For the command involves doing something which is difficult. It calls for courage and patience to fast. Accordingly, mention is made first of faith. The believers are asked to discharge this duty. For they have entered into a covenant with God to obey His commands. They have pledged their servitude to Him, affirming that He is the Master and Ruler. They are bound to abide by His commands, irrespective of their self-interest. For they are obliged to perform whatever He commands of them. This is because of their servitude to Him. Being His servants they are expected to behave thus. They are at His beck and call. Allah being All-Wise begins the command in the above fashion. Otherwise, secular laws are promulgated without any reference to one's gain or safety against some loss. Although Allah is the absolute Ruler, Creator of the heavens and earth who exercises total control over everyone's life, honour and property, He invokes the conviction of believers. Muslim are exhorted to act on the dictates of their faith. They are expected to respond vigorously and positively to His call. Against this backdrop they are told that a month-long fasting is prescribed for them as a religious duty.

Allah is thoroughly conversant with human nature. For He is man's Creator. At the same time, He makes certain allowances for man out of His wisdom and mercy. Whenever He enacts a command, He prepares man mentally for it, enabling him to obey His command willingly. Man is instinctively repulsed by something new and odd. However, on realising that something is a standard practice, followed down the ages by many generations, man is drawn towards it and feels no hesitation in obeying such a command.

Believers are informed that fasting was a duty obligatory upon earlier generations as well. One learns from the history of world

religions and nations that fasting has been a religious obligation in some form during all periods of time. Its details may be found in religious and historical works. One learns the exact form and duration of fasting among different religious communities. Finer points about the restrictions and the starting and concluding times of fasting may also be gleaned. Constraints of space prevent us from exploring this point any further.

The important truth brought home though is that fasting helps man attain piety. The Qur'ān employs the term *taqwā* in this context. Generally speaking, words are invested with different meanings with the passage of time. A pious person is taken to be one who is constantly engaged in worship, and who sleeps little. One who does not fall asleep at all is recognised as a perfectly pious person. He is expected to offer prayers all the time and is very cautious about each and every issue, be it religious or mundane. In the original Arabic, however, *taqwā* does not carry these shades of meaning. It does not imply that one blessed with *taqwā* is given wholly to worship, stays awake throughout the night and fasts round the year. Instead *taqwā* signifies in the original Arabic a state of mind and consciousness. It encompasses one's temperament and way of thinking. Ramaḍān helps man attain piety. Yet it does not mean that with the passage of Ramaḍān, piety comes to an end. Piety is not some temporary condition.

Piety represents a constant state of self-control and restraint. If a child is brought up well, he imbibes the value of respecting his elders. He does not indulge in any act in the presence of his elders which may be offensive to them. By the same token, he refrains from mocking or insulting them. Piety signifies such a training of the mind which guides one to practise moral values all the time. A pious person thinks carefully before taking any action whether his act is permitted by the *Sharīʿah* or not. This reference to the *Sharīʿah* at every step is a pointer to one's piety. Take the illustrious examples of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, holding exalted rank among the Prophet's Companions. They were witness to the

revelation of the Qur'ān. Furthermore, they possessed mastery over the Arabic language and idiom. They were both born and brought up in Makkah and used the local language fluently. As true Companions they never felt shy of seeking clarification from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). For their main preoccupation was to advance their knowledge. Once they asked ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd to define *taqwā*. To this he replied: "O Commander of the Faithful! Have you ever walked on a path with thorns on either side?" When ʿUmar replied in the affirmative, he asked as to how he walked on that path. ʿUmar replied: "I walk cautiously, ensuring that body and clothes are safe against thorns." ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd exclaimed: "This is the definition of *taqwā* – to lead life in a way without doing anything which may displease Allah. One's deeds should not be discordant with the *Sharīʿah*."

Those not familiar with Arabic idiom think that fasting is prescribed for making believers pious. It is not however the point that one who fasts for twenty-nine or thirty days in Ramaḍān will turn into a pious person at the end of the month. One who fasts, recites the Qur'ān often and prays to Allah at night, including offering *Tarāwīḥ* Prayers, does not turn automatically into a pious person. This is not the end of his test. It signifies, at most, that he did not eat or drink during the daytime in Ramaḍān even what is lawful and wholesome, and he did so at Allah's command. Even a drop of water was not consumed by him. Needless to add, water is one of the greatest divine bounties. Allah has created every living being out of water. A true believer does not eat food during the daytime of Ramaḍān, though he was provided with food by Allah. He had food items at home bought out of his lawful earnings. Yet he did not take food or water, though he needed these as a human being. Only in deference to Allah's command did he not touch these. For Allah has promulgated that a believer should not take these otherwise lawful and wholesome things from dawn to dusk. Not a drop of water should pass his lips. Since one does all this in accordance with Allah's command, one should make a point of

living by His directives after Ramaḍān as well. One should discern between the lawful and the unlawful. We are very sensitive to any impurity. Let us bear in mind that disobedience to Allah is the most damaging impurity.

As we forego lawful and wholesome things during Ramaḍān in deference to Allah's command, we should not draw near any sin after the month of Ramaḍān is over. We should not do anything which may displease Him. Nor should we ever tell a lie. By the same token, we should not give any false testimony or hurt any fellow Muslim's feelings. We should not deny anyone his due or indulge in slandering. We should refrain from stealing, injustice, violence, and hurting others. Piety consists in shunning all that is sinful, impure and immoral. A constant effort to keep away from evil constitutes piety.

There is some difference between an act of worship and piety. The latter represents an outlook and temperament. One may perform acts of worship. However, in a state of anger and in mundane transactions one may disregard the spirit of one's worship. This underscores a lack of piety. One's mind should be permeated with piety. Fasting is prescribed for Muslims for instilling piety into their minds and hearts. One should think all along of one's ultimate return and accountability to Allah.

Piety signifies God-consciousness. One should weigh up before doing anything whether this act will please or enrage Allah. One should ascertain first whether such action is in accord with the *Sharī'ah* or not, and whether it is lawful or not. One's action should follow the command of Allah and His Messenger. Becoming habitual about this constant checking infuses piety into one. This is the rationale behind declaring fasting in Ramaḍān as an obligatory duty. For it may bless one with piety.

7. The Message of *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr*

يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُمُ ٱلْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ ٱلْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا۟ ٱلْعِدَّةَ
وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَىٰكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾ وَإِذَا
سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. [He wants that] you must complete the same number of days and that you must magnify Allah for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him. And when My slaves ask you [O Prophet] concerning Me, then [tell them] I am indeed near. I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me. So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led alright.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:185-186)

This passage relates to the blessed month of Ramaḍān. The Qur'ānic account of fasting marks the opening of this passage which states that fasting is prescribed as a religious duty for Muslims, as it was for the believers of an earlier date. It is prescribed so that they may become pious. It is further clarified that the Qur'ān was sent down during this month and that the Qur'ān is guidance for all mankind. Contained in it are signs as guidance and criterion.

In this passage Allah tells Muslims that He intends ease for them. He does not want to put them to any difficulty. Fasting for twenty-nine or thirty days during Ramaḍān is not an impossible task. Muslims are asked to fast for a limited number of days. This is followed by the directive that they should celebrate Allah's praise in that He has guided them. They are obliged to praise Him for having blessed them with His guidance. They are also exhorted to thank Allah and express gratitude to Him.

Allah mentions implicitly *ʿĪd* in the above passage. Although the festival of *ʿĪd* is not specified, the passage states the objective, spirit and function of *ʿĪd*. As Allah enables a Muslim to fast during Ramaḍān and pray at night, he should celebrate Allah's glory. This should be by way of thanks for the bestowal of His guidance. A Muslim stands indebted to Him for blessing him with faith and Islam. Without His leave he could neither fast nor pray. For there are numerous communities besides Muslims in the world. They know well that Muslims celebrate Ramaḍān in a particular way. Yet it makes no difference to them. Ramaḍān does not carry any meaning and message for them.

We should be grateful to Allah for having guided us. We should be equally grateful for being blessed with Islam. Moreover, we should be thankful to Him for granting us health which enables us to fast. Above all, Allah grants us the ability and strength to fast. For one may possess everything yet not receive divine guidance to fast. One may be an adult, with sound physique and other resources yet still not fast. It amounts to disobedience on his part.

That Allah alone grants the ability is the real thing. It is He Who inspires man to fast during Ramaḍān and to pray to Him. In sum, He guides us to fast. Yet there are those who possess the facilities and resources to fast but who do not do so. This is because Allah does not inspire such a person to fast. A believer is obliged to celebrate Allah's praise for having provided him with the requisite resources and ability to fast. Since there is nothing to prohibit one from fasting, it is imperative for one to fast. The directive to celebrate Allah's praise is on account of the same – the ability granted by Him to fast.

It is part of the *Sunnah* that on the day of *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr* one should celebrate Allah's praise on one's way to the mosque. On *ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā* one should chant such praise aloud: "Allah is great. Allah is great. There is no god besides Allah. Allah is great. All praise is for Allah." It is also part of the *Sunnah* that one should use two different routes for going to the mosque to offer prayer. This results in circulating

Allah's praise throughout the whole town. The inhabitants of the town will hence receive this message. While waiting for the *ʿĪd* Prayer to commence, one should keep on praising Him for His guidance and this out of gratitude. For Allah has granted one the ability to fast. One will be pardoned for missing a fast on account of ill health.

It is common knowledge that festivals are an occasion for expressing joy. One is relieved of one's duties, enabling one to enjoy the festival. Islam is, however, the only faith that *obliges* its followers to perform extra duty on the day of festival. Nonetheless, this duty is not very burdensome. Rather, it accrues more blessings. It instructs the believers in self-restraint and decency. On *ʿĪd* day Muslims are obliged to offer two additional *rakʿah* of prayer. They are not exempted from discharging their religious duty on this day, as they have to offer extra prayer in between the compulsory *Fajr* and *Ẓuhr* Prayers. This is the Islamic way of expressing gratitude to Allah.

The Muslim community is thus consistently instructed in thanking Allah. No other religious community is particular about this. The Muslims alone try to perform this. They discharge their duty and thank Allah for enabling them to do so.

Other religious communities do not offer extra prayers or charity on their festival days. Rather, they enjoy life, engrossed in eating and drinking. In Islam, however, the focus is on giving – charity to the poor, gratitude to Allah and celebrating of Allah's praise. This is done in order to thank Allah for His guidance. It expresses Muslims' gratefulness to Him.

8. The Final Message

ٱلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ ٱلْإِسْلَٰمَ دِينًا ... ﴿٣﴾

This day I have perfected your religion for you. I have completed My favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:3)

It emerges from studying the Qur'ān that two points are crucial to faith. First the spread of faith and second measures to protect faith. As regards the former, the Qur'ān contains clear guidance: *It is Allah Who has sent His Messenger [the Prophet Muḥammad] with guidance and the religion of truth, to make it superior over all religions even though the polytheists hate it.* (*al-Tawbah* 9:33) Elsewhere too, it is said that Allah will accomplish the above, much to the chagrin of the unbelievers. (*al-Tawbah* 9:32)

It is clear from the Qur'ānic statement given in *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* that Islam will establish its superiority over all religions. This will occur not only in the political domain, but also in terms of its impact on the human mind. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was given the glad tidings: *When there comes the help of Allah to you [O Prophet] and the victory, and you see the people enter Allah's religion in crowds, glorify the praise of your Lord, and ask His forgiveness. He is the One Who always accepts repentance and Who forgives.* (*al-Naṣr* 110:1-3)

The divine promise that people would embrace Islam in large numbers came true during the Prophet's life time. The Qur'ān asserts:

Allah has promised those among you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will certainly grant them succession in the land, as He granted it to those before them, and that He

will grant them the authority to practise their religion which He has chosen for them. And He will surely give them in exchange security after their fear.

(*al-Nūr* 24:55)

This naturally facilitated the spread of Islam. The Qur'ān also states: *Those who, if We give them power in the land, enjoin the establishing of prayer, the payment of zakāh and exhorting people to do good and forbid evil.* (*al-Ḥajj* 22:41)

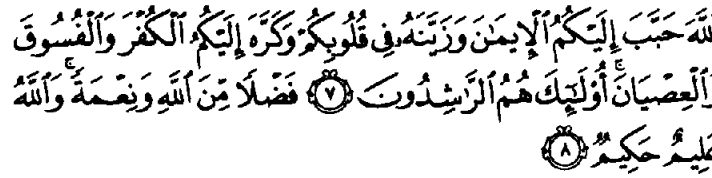
This assertion is especially meaningful. All that is said was actualised, as is borne out by history.

Safeguarding faith is an equally important aspect of the Islamic faith. The Qur'ān has guaranteed it. The Qur'ānic proclamation to this effect is with reference to history and occurs thus: *Verily We have sent down this exhortation and We will guard it.* (*al-Ḥijr* 15:9)

Allah announces that He has revealed the Qur'ān and that He will guard it. He is responsible for its safety and security.

[v]
Social Life

1. Islamic Society



Allah has endeared faith to you and has beautified it in your hearts, and has made disbelief, wickedness and disobedience hateful to you. Such are they who are rightly guided. This is grace from Allah and His favour. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

(*al-Ḥujurāt* 49:7-8)

According to the Qur'ān, a truly Islamic society is one which is permeated with life-ennobling values and excellent morals and manners. Wickedness, sinfulness, injustice and gratification of the self should be antithetical to it. It should reject outright any move which smacks of rebellion of Allah, denial of the rights due fellow human beings and the unbridled self. It should slam its doors on any movement which promotes gratification of the self at the expense

of sacrificing collective and community interests. Such calls should cause revulsion in Islamic society. Muslims should abhor and loath any such move. Islamic society, needless to add, was erected by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and based on Qur'ānic teachings. It is against this backdrop that the above verses declare that the Islamic society holds faith dear to itself and abhors any wickedness and disobedience of Allah. Only those behaving thus are on the straight path and enjoy Allah's grace and reward.

Arabic-speaking readers of the Qur'ān can better appreciate the force and eloquence of this passage. It identifies how believers are elated with their faith. Nothing else delights them so much. For faith is entrenched deep into their hearts. It is their natural and mental state. If values and virtues flourish in society, its members are naturally drawn towards the call to truth. They do not face any mental reservation or hesitation in responding positively to it.

Since Allah, the author of the Qur'ān, is man's Creator, He knows well the intricacies of human nature. The believers' deep commitment to faith is contrasted with their revulsion towards sin and wickedness. Disbelief, transgression and disobedience of Allah are hateful to them. This captures the spirit of Islamic society. For it is founded on a sound basis, able to withstand evil forces and rises to the occasion in every test and trial. Believers are instinctively drawn towards virtue. Speaking highly of believers, Allah says: *When the unbelievers had put in their hearts pride and haughtiness, the pride of the Jāhiliyyah period, Allah sent down His tranquillity upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and made them adhere to the world of piety and they were well entitled to it and worthy of it. And Allah is All-Knowing of everything.* (*al-Fatḥ* 48:26)

This passage demonstrates how the unbelievers were swayed by the pride and haughtiness of *jāhiliyyah*. Included in this reference are all forms of nationalism, racism, self-interest and selfishness. Linguistic chauvinism belongs to the same category. Linguistic pride has led to many divisions, bloodshed and violence in society. It makes men blind to moral values and reduces them to beasts. Under its sway

men feel no qualms of conscience in killing fellow human beings on a large scale. In sum, *jāhiliyyah* has always played havoc with human society.

While the unbelievers were gripped by *jāhiliyyah* Allah infused piety into the hearts of the believers. Piety became part and parcel of their being. It was reflected in their personality and temperament. It goes without saying that one acts in response to one's main personality traits.

It is worth considering that the Qur'ān asserts that piety was made an ineluctable part of the believers' everyday lives. No one could distract them from this way of piety. That they were worthy of it further reinforces the above idea. The believers imbibed piety. Such instances of an entire community being soaked in morality are rare in history. Such heights of morality are generally unimaginable for human beings. Elsewhere, while discussing the circulation of a slanderous report among the early Muslims, the Qur'ān poses the question: *Why then did not the believers, men and women, when you heard it [the slander], think good of their own people and say: This [charge] is an obvious lie?* (*al-Nūr* 24:12)

They were expected to refute out of hand the charge against a chaste person. They should have acted as a mirror to the fellow believer. They were obliged to dismiss such a scandalous report immediately. Since they did not and could not indulge in such a shameful deed, they should have ruled out the involvement of a fellow Muslim in it. In a truly Islamic society all Muslims are equally virtuous. They should defend one another against baseless reports, with the full confidence that one of them could not commit such a heinous act. Such a perfectly moral society was erected under the Prophet's care. All of the believers were alike in practising high moral standards. Such Islamic polity alone can lead mankind into the future. To it can be entrusted the task of guiding and training subsequent generations of mankind.

2. Men and Women as constituents of the Society

فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَآ أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَٰمِلٍ مِّنكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ ... ﴿١٩٥﴾

So their Lord accepted of them [their supplication and answered them]: Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be you male or female.

(*Āl ʿImrān* 3:195)

This passage follows the supplications made by the believers. They are seen invoking Allah from the depths of their hearts. Their supplications are permeated with their unwavering faith. Take the following as illustrative: *Our Lord! Verily, we have heard the call of one [the Prophet] calling to faith: "Believe in your Lord." And we have believed. Our Lord! Grant us what You promised to us through Your Messengers and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. For You never break Your promise.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:193-194)

The former passage is indeed very significant. For it relates that the believers listened to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) inviting them to believe in their Lord. They greeted his call and with reference to the same they invoked Allah to pardon and overlook their sins.

One may instinctively conclude that these supplications were made by men. For the caller was a male. Naturally the men who listened to him responded to his call. This is no doubt true. However, in speaking of His reward and acceptance of these supplications, Allah makes a pointed reference to women as well. The context does not apparently demand their specific mention.

Had the response been from a male, no matter how distinguished a writer, legislator, psychologist or even a champion of women's liberation he might be, he would have disregarded women in his response. For the supplications are made by men. It is reflective of

Allah's boundless mercy that He includes both men and women in His response. Being the Creator of both sexes He has affection for both in equal measure. In His response, He accepts their supplications and affirms that He will not let anyone's deeds, be they male or female, go to waste. He appreciates everyone's sacrifice and good deeds. He promises equal reward for men and women. In receiving Allah's mercy both have an equal share. He delivers them alike, without preference or reservation.

On studying the passage one is persuaded of both the miracle of the Qur'ān and of divine mercy. It should fill our hearts with delight and gratitude. It is also apt for women to express their deep thanks to Allah for this great favour. Although the supplications make no reference to women, for all the pronouns are masculine, nonetheless Allah, being the Lord of the worlds, makes a similar promise of reward to both men and women. Men are rather admonished for having neglected a major part of human society. They may even have disregarded women. However, Allah does not and cannot overlook them. He does not let the good deeds of anyone, male or female, go to waste. In His scheme of things, men and women are interdependent. Our social life is composed of both sexes: in this respect then they are inseparable.

Upon further analysis of the expressions employed in this Qur'ānic passage, it emerges that the impact of one's deeds will appear both in this life and the Next. The verse encompasses both worlds. The Qur'ān clarifies that women will be rewarded in full for all of their good deeds, knowledge and hard work. Both men and women will be rewarded, if they work to make their lives meaningful and enjoyable. Their reward will not be deferred until the Next Life. They will reap the benefits of their hard work in this life too. This point is amply illustrated by Muslim history whereby Muslims have attained both academic and spiritual success. Men have however dominated the spiritual domain, for this calls for special qualities. It is also easier for men to participate in *Jihād*, to offer prayers throughout the night and to fast regularly. Yet the Qur'ān in its

inimitable and miraculous way proclaims that no one's deeds will be wasted. Whoever strives will be amply rewarded. In the spiritual domain we have the illustrious example of Rābi'ah al-Baṣriyyah who reached such heights of spiritual perfection. One devoted to this field may not equal or even excel her.

3. Human relations in society

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُوا۟ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَٰحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَآءً ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى تَسَآءَلُونَ بِهِۦ وَٱلْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ﴿١﴾

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person [Adam] and from him, He created his wife [Eve], and from them both He created many men and women. And fear Allah through Whom you demand [your mutual rights] and [do not cut the relations of] the wombs [kinship]. Surely, Allah is ever a watcher over you.

(*al-Nisā'* 4:1)

The above passage is from *Sūrah al-Nisā'*. As *al-Nisā'* is the Arabic expression for women, the very title of the *sūrah* underscores the important status accorded to women in Islam. More significantly, this passage highlights the male-female relationship in Islam, for it relates their mutual roles and obligations. First, it is clarified that both men and women are created alike. Their fate is interlinked, like two parts of the same body. They differ slightly in their physical appearance. However, this is done in order to facilitate their pleasant companionship.

It must be borne in mind that both are from a single soul – Adam. Notwithstanding the creation of Eve from Adam, there is not any essential difference between them. Rather, they have numerous points

of convergence. Men and women are fellow travellers in the phase of this life. They account for the multiplication of the human race. Allah blessed the companionship of Adam with Eve and infused them with love for each other. As a result, they grew from two into thousands and presently into billions. Even a super computer cannot work out the total number of human beings born in this world since its beginning. Allah alone knows their exact number. This verse underlines the innumerable number of men and women born of Adam and Eve.

Another significant point brought home is that men and women demand mutual rights while invoking Allah. The Qur'ān presented for the first time the radical idea that each and every member of human society is interdependent. Each has rights and obligations towards others. It is not so that some human beings are absolute masters, having nothing to do with fellow human beings. On the contrary, human beings are dependent upon one another. Rights and obligations bind them to one another. Our social life represents a broad network, to which each one of us is linked.

Men cannot lead a natural, happy life without women. This is also true for women who cannot lead life happily without a male partner. Allah has made men and women indispensable for each other.

Both invoke Allah for their needs. The concept or presence of Allah in Islamic society is of paramount importance. This society rests on the belief in Allah's greatness, power and Oneness. The marital tie of a Muslim male with his Muslim wife is legitimate only when it is done through invocation to Allah. This brings them closer to each other. Total strangers turn into close companions, thanks to their invoking of Him. They come so near that all barriers are removed. They cannot think of living without their companion. As life partners they are responsible for each other. The relationship between husband and wife hinges on total trust and love. Often it surpasses one's link with one's parents, for it is marked by such frankness, transparency and naturalness which is inconceivable in any other relationship. This miracle happens as the couple enter into a matrimonial alliance in the name of Allah. They start a new life as marriage partners. Prior

to marriage they may have been total strangers to each other and certainly could not have enjoyed each other's company prior to this tie. However, marriage being a sacred tie invoking the name of Allah makes them so intimate one to another.

In its inimitable style the Qur'ān employs a single expression which speaks volumes about the intimate and close relationship between husband and wife. It cannot be defined more adequately in any charter or code or a work of sociology or of collective life.

It is further emphasised that since the marital tie is sanctified with reference to Allah's name, they should be particular about honouring this sacred and mighty name. Elsewhere the Qur'ān describes the husband and wife relationship thus: "*They [women] are a garment for you and you are a garment for them.*" (*al-Baqarah* 2:187) Garment here is used as a metaphor to indicate the male-female relationship. It goes without saying that garments are essential for covering the body and for presenting oneself decorously. This metaphor says much about the interdependence of the two spouses. Without clothes, man is reduced to the level of animals, without a sense of purpose. So, without marriage, man is unable to lead a decent, civilised life. Marriage enables man to lead life purposively.

4. The place of women in Islamic society

إِنَّ ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ وَٱلْمُسْلِمَٰتِ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ وَٱلْقَٰنِتِينَ
وَٱلْقَٰنِتَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ وَٱلصَّٰدِقَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ وَٱلصَّٰبِرَٰتِ
وَٱلْخَٰشِعِينَ وَٱلْخَٰشِعَٰتِ وَٱلْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَٱلْمُتَصَدِّقَٰتِ
وَٱلصَّٰٓئِمِينَ وَٱلصَّٰٓئِمَٰتِ وَٱلْحَٰفِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَٱلْحَٰفِظَٰتِ
وَٱلذَّٰكِرِينَ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱلذَّٰكِرَٰتِ أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً
وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٣٥﴾

> *Verily Muslims, men and women, the believing men and women, men and women who are obedient, men and women who are truthful, men and women who are patient, men and women who are humble, men and women who give charity, men and women who fast, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who remember Allah much, Allah has promised forgiveness for them and a great reward.*
>
> (*al-Aḥzāb* 33:35)

Almighty Allah takes delight in speaking highly of such devout women. Human attributes cannot be ascribed to Him. On analysing this passage one is apt to say that women are relatively less truthful, less patient and less devoted to Allah. In an emotional crisis they lose poise and self-control and utter such statements which may put their faith in jeopardy. Women also grieve more.

However, Allah is fully conversant with human nature. He foresaw that such weaknesses would be imputed to women. He therefore mentions women at length and invests them with all the virtues which can be attained by men. He loves men and women alike. His mercy encompasses both sexes.

The passage clarifies that devout believing women do not lag behind men. They may equal men in excellent conduct and virtue. They are entitled to equal reward. Their gender is not a disadvantage. Nor is it an obstacle to their attaining a higher status and to fulfilling the purpose of their creation. These virtues are not alien to their gender.

It would have sufficed to say that men and women may achieve the same rank. However, the Qur'ān mentions both men and women separately and independently. The message is loud and clear. Worship is not only men's domain. Women may excel in this field. So is also the case with fasting. For here too women may remember Allah as much as men can. It emerges from the history of other religions that certain qualities are earmarked for men alone. The assumption was that only men could reach such heights. Women were not granted

such equal status. They were not expected to annex exalted rank. The Qur'ān, however, does away with such a distinction, declaring that both men and women can excel in their worship of Allah.

Al-Nisā' (Women) is one of the longer Qur'ānic *sūrahs*. Hindu scriptures by comparison do not give such prominence to women. In Islam women have equal opportunity with men, as also the same ability and capacity for attaining the highest rank in worshipping, and obeying Allah, winning His pleasure and earning a coveted position in His sight. In short, women have the potential to do the same as men.

The Qur'ān speaks of equality among men and women in worship and religious obligations. Women are equally fit to enjoin good and forbid evil. They may enforce the Islamic moral code perfectly in the same manner as male *'Ulamā'* may accomplish it. Allah looks upon women as equal partners with believing men in promoting virtue and good. This truth is stated more forcefully in the following Qur'ānic passage: *The believers, men and women, are supporters of one another. They enjoin good and forbid evil. They perform prayers, give zakāh and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have His mercy on them. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.* (*al-Tawbah* 9:71)

5. A Successful life

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهُۥ حَيَوٰةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

Whoever does good, whether male or female, while he or she is a believer, We will give him a good life and We shall certainly pay them a reward in proportion to the best of what they did.
(*al-Naḥl* 16:97)

The above verse should draw our immediate attention. For Allah makes mention of men and women separately with reference to their good deeds. Women are promised the same reward which is held out to men. Both are told about the immense benefits of doing good. It is common knowledge that good deeds are beneficial. Yet this verse brings home a special point which has gone largely unnoticed. Of course this has been memorised by numerous people. *'Ulamā'* have elucidated its meaning in their own ways too. Nonetheless, the glad tidings implicit in the verse have not received due attention. Allah promises that whoever does good, whether male or female, will be blessed with a successful life. All the striving in the world in countries as diverse as the USA and Indonesia and in the Muslim world from Morocco to North Africa, Yemen and Malaysia is directed at the same goal of achieving a successful life. Much time, energy and resources are spent on identifying the key to a happy life. For everyone seeks it. It has been the subject of intense debate at educational institutions and specialised centres. Leading authors reflect on this issue. Furthermore, it lies at the core of politics, elections, democracy and the media. Each institution of public life claims that it will direct society to happiness and success.

Allah announces such glad tidings in this verse, proclaiming that whoever does good will be rewarded with a successful life. It is, nonetheless, subject to the condition that one's good deeds should be in accord with His command and will. These should fit in with the Prophet's teachings and the *Sharī'ah*. Needless to add, these should follow the Qur'ānic code, which is the final divine message. If this condition is met, Allah will bestow a good life upon believers, including the life of this world. This promise is not specific to the Hereafter. The divine promise is of a good, successful life. All worldly pursuits, including education and obtaining higher degrees are focused on the same goal of achieving a successful life. Men and women opt for different professional careers to achieve the same end.

It is everyone's dream to secure a hefty salary, a sprawling house, an expensive, luxurious car for transport and entitlement to air travel. Those who enter politics aim at becoming members of parliament, and even heads of state. All this is done in order to enjoy a comfortable life. Happiness is an oft-repeated expression. It is an antonym for sorrow and misery. Significantly enough, Allah has guaranteed in the above verse a happy life for everyone . He declares that the way to it however consists in doing good. If one performs good acts in line with His commands such a person is bound to be blessed with a happy, successful life.

Allah's promise is above and beyond doubt. Yet Allah has assured us that He will certainly reward such men and women who do good with a successful life. As we noted earlier, all human beings exert themselves day and night to secure a happy life.

Some interpret a happy life only in terms of a high salary. However, this is not true. Everyone so remunerated with a hefty salary does not necessarily lead a happy life. Rather, there are numerous examples that contradict the above proposition. Many people receiving a good salary lead miserable lives. They suffer from ill-health, family feuds, emotional imbalance, or nervous breakdowns. Some are even afflicted with insecurity or psychological disorders. Despite their high income, palatial houses and impressive cars they do not and cannot enjoy life. They are unable to appreciate the real bounties of life. This is a point worth considering. For Allah states that whoever abides by His commands, the *Sharī'ah*, and the teachings of His Messenger, disregarding local customs and traditions, will enjoy a happy life. One should not be concerned with social norms nor about whether one's actions will be met with public approval or not. Likewise, one should not be carried away by such worldly considerations as wealth and honour. One should not hanker after these. On the contrary, all one's actions should conform to the commands of Allah and His Messenger. In marriage, the upbringing of children, and one's daily life routine he should strictly follow the *Sharī'ah*. Prayers should be regularly offered. Values such as modesty, chastity and respect

for others should flourish. One's conduct should not betray pride, self-projection, squandering or un-Islamic practices. One's actions should not be for the sake of pleasing others. Allah's pleasure should be one's only concern.

If one leads one's life along these lines, Allah promises one happiness and success. Numerous examples bear out this truth. Those who followed the *Sharīʿah* and acted in accordance with the directives of Allah and His Messenger led enviable lives. It emerges from the study of *Ḥadīth* that these noble souls disregarded ancestral customs and traditions and adhered only to the Islamic model. They listened only to what Allah and His Messenger told them. All the individuals, families, communities and countries that followed the Islamic model tasted happiness and success. They enjoyed a Paradisal life in this world itself. For their conduct was characterised by mutual love, and the discharging of obligations towards others. They did not usurp anyone else's rights. Nor did they look down upon others. They did not indulge in vanity. Nor were they drawn towards illegitimate sources of income. On the contrary, they reposed their trust in Allah, offered prayers regularly and thrived only on a lawful income. They made sure that no illegitimate income could be ascribed to them. Those who follow such a code of conduct lead a happy, carefree life. Their modest houses are better than palaces. For those subsisting on unlawful earnings undergo much torment and suffering. Notwithstanding their outward opulence they lack basic human values. Their life is marred by marital discord, family tension and lack of values such as sympathy and kindness. They do not help the weak and the poor. Rather, all of their time, money and energy are wasted on making a grand show.

Allah has provided every male and female with the opportunity to enjoy a happy, successful life, if they adhere to the *Sharīʿah*, obey Him and act on the Prophet's teachings. Doing so, they can attain the heights of spiritual development and happiness. Let us be reminded that this opportunity is not exclusive to men, it is open in equal measure to both men and women.

6. Guidelines for married life

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُوا۟ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَٰحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَآءً ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى تَسَآءَلُونَ بِهِۦ وَٱلْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ﴿١﴾

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person [Adam] and from him, he created his wife [Eve], and from them both He created many men and women. And fear Allah through Whom you demand [your mutual rights] and [do not cut the relations of] the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is ever a watcher over you.

(*al-Nisā'* 4:1)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِۦ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

O Believers! Fear Allah as He should be feared. And do not die except in the state of Islam.

(*Āl 'Imrān* 3:102)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَقُولُوا۟ قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿٧٠﴾ يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَٰلَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٧١﴾

O Believers! Fear Allah and speak the truth. He will direct you to good deeds and will forgive your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger he has indeed attained a great achievement.

(*al-Aḥzāb* 33:70-71)

Apart from being the fulfilment of a biological need, marriage represents a kind of worship. All the messengers of Allah entered into wedlock. It is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). In Islam marriage constitutes an important message, reminding man of his important duty. It makes man cognisant of his servitude to Allah, his humanness, his obligations and *Sharī'ah* commands.

The verses quoted above are usually recited in the marriage sermon. These convey an important message for this pleasant duty and provide directives for the whole of married life. They further embody a code of conduct which should govern our lives. For these contain divine directives about how we should lead our lives. The first verse is from *Sūrah al-Nisā'*. This *sūrah* is entitled *al-Nisā'* (Women), which underscores the important status enjoyed by women in Islam. It is absolutely clear that in Islam women have both rights and duties. The passage opens with an address to the whole of mankind. Man being man has his human needs and limitations. He has natural urges which are recognised by the *Sharī'ah*. It is natural for man to have a life partner. It helps him lead life positively and meaningfully. Allah asks mankind to fear their Lord Who has created them from a single person, Adam and from him He created his wife, Eve.

The verse recounts the beginning of the human race. It was an auspicious beginning, which encompasses the whole of mankind. It is the story of our ancestors as well. It lent meaning and colour to human existence. Allah started human life from a single person. Nonetheless, He soon created a spouse for Adam. Their union, rather marriage according to the *Sharī'ah* was blessed so much by Allah that the entire world is now populated. This is because their marriage followed natural and moral principles. Without this the world would have been a desolate place. Allah therefore, mentions the first pair as a blessing. Their auspicious union by Allah's leave, led to the appearance of the entire human race.

Man should learn lessons from this event. It should reassure him of divine help and support. Allah exhorts man that he should fear

Allah. For it is He Who created him from a single person. At the beginning there was a single person. However, Allah provided him with a partner and brought about their union. As a result, there have appeared numerous men and women. Their exact number cannot be ascertained by any researcher. Man should fear Allah, for while invoking Him he asks fellow human beings to fulfil their obligations to him. Again it is Allah Who grants man everything – life, mental faculties, knowledge and strength. A large gap in man's life is however filled by his marriage, as he is blessed with a marriage partner.

Throughout his life man asks Allah to do him favours, one after another. No one is exempt from this. Interestingly enough, man is accountable for all that he gets. Man is dependent upon both Allah and his fellow human beings in all his transactions and social relations. Education, and ties with one's teacher exemplify this very well. A student seeks knowledge from his teacher. By the same token, his teacher is accountable for his assignment. One has something while another person needs the same. Each one of us is in need of and dependent in equal measure on others. Those in charge of important affairs cannot accomplish anything without taking help from others. Kings need subjects. Without the latter, the former cannot exercise their power and authority.

Accordingly, man is asked to fear Allah in Whose name he invokes others' help. One seeks the hand of a female belonging to another family. This involves others' honour and prestige. However, this is regularly done in Allah's name. Islam linked people and taught them to join with one another through matrimonial alliance. This amounts to forging mutual relations among individuals, races and communities. However, Allah's name should be invoked in marriage. In discharging matrimonial obligations one should fear Allah, for by invoking His name one entered wedlock in the first place. Moreover, throughout life one should abide by His commands by way of following the *Sharīʿah*. One should be very particular about the lawful and unlawful as declared by Him. It would be very mean and selfish for anyone to invoke Allah's name to meet their needs and then disregard Him

altogether. The thrust of the verse then is fear of Allah. As man invokes His name in marriage, he should thus fear Him constantly.

Man is also exhorted to maintain the ties of kinship. In the face of a new tie, older ones should not be ignored. Some people are apt to do just that. However, Allah insists that the ties which one had before marriage should be respected. One is expected to fulfil one's obligations to one's mother, father, sisters and brothers. Marriage does not then imply the snapping of earlier ties. Both the bride and bridegroom are instructed to bear this in mind. This advice extends to their family members as well. This is followed by the reminder: "*Allah is ever a watcher over you.*" In other words, one should not take the above advice lightly, thinking that one will not be called to account for one's conduct.

In verse 102 of *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān* believers are asked to fear Allah as much as He should be feared. Man is not free to set some standard on this count. Fear of Allah is already determined by the *Sharīʿah*. This consists in obeying His commands and in pursuing the way prescribed by Him. Muslims are also exhorted to maintain their faith. They should not die except in a state of Islam. This brings into sharp view another eternal truth.

Marriage is no doubt a happy occasion. One should enjoy this auspicious event. Yet one should not forget that life is transitory. One should ensure that one is a believer at the time of death. One's life should be characterised by obedience to Allah. By the same token, at death one should be submissive to Allah, demonstrating love and respect for Allah and His Messenger. One should furthermore recite the credal statement of faith as one leaves this world.

The last verse quoted, once again, exhorts believers to fear Allah and speak the truth. One's acceptance of faith should not be a mere verbal utterance. Rather, is should be a well thought out, conscious decision. One should realise what this entails in terms of obligations and their implications.

The believers are directed to speak the truth. If they grow habitual of it, it will transform them into men of character. It will set their

course in life. As a result, Allah will help and reinforce them. Today we have got every material comfort. We draw upon numerous resources. Thanks to scientific and technological inventions we can lead a comfortable life. Yet we are negligent of our obligations. We disregard the ultimate reality. Allah, however, promises that He will improve our deeds. For this will help us enjoy a peaceful life. This would aslo put an end to present-day materialism and selfishness. Allah's help can enable us to lead a happy life.

Marriage being part of the Prophet's *Sunnah* draws us closer to Allah Who will pardon our sins. This is indeed a great privilege. Generally, the marriage ceremony is regarded as no more than a ritual. Actually it is a mode of worship. Whoever leads his married life in accordance with the *Shari'ah* is constantly engaged in an act of worship. This point is very well brought out by Shāh Muḥammad Ya'qūb in his observation that as one ends one's prayer, the reward due for it comes to an end as well. However, the reward accruing from marriage continues as long as this tie lasts. All that one earns and spends with the intention of supporting one's family, all the affection which one showers on them and all the time one spends with them will be a source of credit and reward. Little wonder then that the Qur'ānic verse concludes on the note: "*Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger he has indeed attained a great achievement.*"

7. The Importance of justice in society

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِٱلْعَدْلِ وَٱلْإِحْسَٰنِ وَإِيتَآئِ ذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ ٱلْفَحْشَآءِ وَٱلْمُنكَرِ وَٱلْبَغْىِ ۚ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

Allah enjoins justice, performing duties for only Allah's sake, giving help to kith and kin, forbidding evil, obscenity and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.

(*al-Naḥl* 16:90)

The above verse forms part of the Friday Prayer sermon. Every week Muslims listen to this. However, since most of us (Indian Muslims) do not know Arabic, we fail to reflect on its meaning and message. We take worship only as a ritual, without drawing any lesson from it. Nor do we care to consult *'Ulamā'* on its import.

The verse does however encapsulate a comprehensive code of conduct, full of directives. The first and foremost divine command is to do justice. The Qur'ān does not specify any particular mode of justice. Rather, its directive is in the absolute, general form. Each one of us should practise justice and do good. On the issue of giving financial help, however, the Qur'ān draws a line of demarcation. One should help one's kith and kin. These ties of kinship encompass one's relations with one's family, one's neighbourhood, one's countrymen, and one's colleagues. Elsewhere the Qur'ān instructs that the starting point should be one's close relatives; one should then move on to help others.

The next directive is to shun everything that is obscene, immoral and evil. One should avoid bad conduct as well. All these directives are issued for man's admonition. In our times, the dispensation of justice is selective. We seek justice only when it concerns us, our relatives, our co-religionists and our tribe or community. We want justice in our favour. However, we are lukewarm to the demands of justice, if it involves some stranger. If we are not to achieve any material benefit, we are not keen on doing justice. Likewise, for fear of criticism too, we stay away from doing justice lest it damage our reputation. In practising justice we are driven by the concerns of our family and our country.

It is hard to do justice just for the sake of doing justice. Man thus finds it difficult to practise justice in accordance with divine commands. One might recognise some truth. However, it may still not be easy for one to act on this. Only such servants of Allah are committed to justice in an absolute sense who fear Allah and who have love and respect for humanity. For they believe that the whole of mankind represents Allah's family.

It is recorded in *Ḥadīth* that all creatures belong to Allah's family. By this definition, all human beings are members of the same family. Let us be reminded that this is the Islamic position on the issue. It goes without saying that Islam makes no compromise on its doctrine of monotheism. It rejects all that runs counter to its main article of faith – the Oneness of Allah. Notwithstanding its extreme sensitivity to the issue of monotheism, Islam looks upon the whole of humanity as Allah's family. This is a very significant point. One-third of the Qur'ān is devoted to the doctrine of monotheism. *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* is designated as equal to one-third of the Qur'ān. It reads as follows: *Say [O Prophet]: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Self-Sufficient. He does not beget. Nor was He begotten. There is no one equal to Him.* (*al-Ikhlāṣ* 112:1-3)

Islam regards all human beings, irrespective of their faith, country of origin, race or colour, as members of Allah's family. He sustains all of us. Allah's favourite servant is not the one who worships Him most. Rather, He loves him who does good to his family members. Had the Qur'ān declared Muslims as members of His family, it would have been perfectly understandable in view of Islam's insistence on monotheism. However, Allah's designation includes all human beings, without any distinction of faith.

Allah has not charged anyone in particular with the duty of dispensing justice. Justice is an obligation incumbent on everyone. Those dispensing it may be Hindu or Muslim by faith. However, the real virtue is justice which does not need any label.

Allah commands that justice and good be done. This is an absolute command. Justice is not to be done only to Muslims. We are asked to praise Allah Who is the Lord and Sustainer of every living being. He is not the Lord of Muslims alone. The Qur'ān does not restrict Him to Arabs or followers of any particular faith. Rather, He is the Cherisher of everyone. He has made available the benefits flowing from the sun, the moon, the solar system, trees, mountains, rivers and animals to everyone. His justice is equally beneficial for everyone. He does not profess and practise justice on a family, or faith

community consideration. This explains the note of universalism in the Qur'ānic assertion that justice and good should be done in an absolute sense.

At another place, the Qur'ān instructs Muslims that their hostility towards another faith community should not distract them from the dictates of justice. For justice is identical with God-consciousness which should permeate Muslims' conduct. Their differences with any group or community should not prompt them to do any injustice to them. Whenever they are called upon to dispense justice, they must fulfil its demands. This will win them Allah's pleasure. This also constitutes obedience to Him.

Let it be clearly understood that justice should be freely available to everyone, no matter to which faith or country they belong. For this is the command of our Lord, Cherisher and Creator. His directive is that no discrimination should mar our conduct. We should not give preference to anyone.

Allah's explicit command is that justice should be dispensed. It should be the hallmark of Muslims. Apart from doing justice, the Muslim should give above and beyond what is one's due. Even if someone acts unjustly towards us, we should do justice to him. This is the type of excellent conduct which the Qur'ān promotes.

8. Pillars of a healthy social life

لَّا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّن نَّجْوَاهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَاحٍ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ ... ﴿١١٤﴾

There is no good in most of their secret talks, except in him who commands charity, enjoins good and brings about conciliation among mankind.

(*al-Nisā'* 4:114)

These are the three pillars to a healthy social life – charity, goodness and peace. Unless people demonstrate sympathy for others in the form of giving charity and sacrificing their selfish interests, they cannot have good social relations. Another equally significant Qur'ānic concept is that of enjoining good. This stands for promoting something which is instinctively acceptable for all decent human beings. It may vary, depending upon local conditions. For example, in one particular society there may be quarrels and in-fighting for men are vulnerable to such feuding.

Mawlānā Ilyās insightfully commented that a burglar strikes only where he expects to find something. Satan is always after the pious and the noble. It is therefore a common sight that people hailing from noble families are riven with hostility. Since the élite are hypersensitive about their honour and prestige, Satan makes them particularly vulnerable on this count. They feel offended where no insult is intended. Rather they nurse a grudge for no reason, for a crime against them has not been committed.

In other words, charity, goodness and cordial relations are needed by everyone all the time. Without charity, mutual love is all dried up. Charity does not always mean giving money. Talking gently to someone and sharing their joys and sorrows also constitutes charity. Giving a helping hand to someone in mounting is another form. Clearing the road of obstacles represents its spirit as well. The Qur'ān employs a comprehensive term, charity, of which there are numerous forms. What is important is a feeling of sympathy, goodwill, sincerity and helpfulness. Without such noble feelings, no healthy social life is possible.

The other Qur'ānic directive is of bringing about reconciliation among people. Cordial social relations are the key to happiness. Today, both these values – charity and peace – are neglected. Divisive forces are dominant everywhere.

Equally important is one's sincere intention. Whoever seeks Allah's pleasure will be rewarded. A good deed may be performed out of

purely selfish or political motives. One may have after all a material interest in doing something good. Accordingly, Allah declares that He will reward lavishly only those who intend to win His pleasure. He will reject any selfish motive. All of our good deeds should spring from the noble objective of earning only His pleasure.

[VI]

Moral Education and Training

1. Introduction

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾

Read! In the name of your Lord Who has created [all that exists]. He has created man from a clot [of congealed blood]. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught man by the pen. He has taught man that which he did not know.

(*al-ʿAlaq* 96:1-5)

This was the first piece of divine revelation sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) while he was in the Ḥirā' cave. Revelation from Allah was resumed thus after a long gap of six hundred years. Significantly enough, these opening verses do not relate to worship, obedience of Allah, or a denunciation of idolatry or *jāhiliyyah*. These are, no doubt, important issues in their own right, and were taken up later at a suitable stage. However, the initial revelation commenced with the directive to read. This historic event provides food for thought for thinkers and historians alike. It symbolised that through the agency of the unlettered Prophet a new

phase would be ushered in. It would be a glorious chapter in the history of religions. It would mark the domination of knowledge. Faith would henceforth be anchored on knowledge which would result in the latter's development and spread.

This new knowledge was, nonetheless, to commence in the name of Allah and through the Prophet's agency. Knowledge would be characterised with universality. Under this new dispensation knowledge would flourish. Man was to gain self-knowledge so that he did not transgress the limits set for him. He was not to be deluded by his mastery over natural resources, his advancements in knowledge, industry and technology. All along he was to bear in mind that he was created from a clot of congealed blood by Allah.

The verses also accord an exalted status to the pen, speaking highly of the accomplishments attained with the help of knowledge. It is worth reminding ourselves here that literacy was highly uncommon in the then Arabia. Few people in Makkah and the Arabian peninsula were literate. Against this backdrop the Qur'ān proclaims that Allah taught man by the pen.

The verses thus point to man's immense potential. He is capable of mastering religious and natural truths and gaining such knowledge which may lead to discoveries and inventions. Man can constantly increase the frontiers of his knowledge. Nonetheless, it is Allah Who has granted man this ability and capacity. In view of the same the Qur'ān reiterates: "Allah has taught man that which he did not know."

2. The Duties of the Messenger of Allah

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى بَعَثَ فِى ٱلْأُمِّيِّـۧنَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ لَفِى ضَلَـٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢﴾

Allah it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger [the Prophet Muḥammad] from among themselves, reciting to

them His verses, purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom. Before this they had been in manifest error.
(*al-Jumuʿah* 62:2)

The above passage spells out the assignment of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). Included in it are four main duties which the Messenger performs as Allah's vicegerent.

The first duty is that of reciting the Qur'ānic verses. This is such an important part of his assignment that Allah mentions it at the very outset. *Tafsīr* literature explains why this has been given precedence over his other duties of teaching and purifying people.

The next duty is that of purifying the character of people, purging them of their base emotions such as jealousy, anger, love of this world and lust for power and honour. These vices are replaced with such virtues as love for Allah, concern for the Hereafter and a keen desire to enter Paradise. The Messenger improves the morals and manners of people and infuses into them the following virtues, as specified in the Qur'ān: *Allah has endeared faith to you and made it attractive in your hearts. He has made unbelief, wickedness and disobedience loathsome to you. Such are the guided people.* (*al-Ḥujurāt* 49:7)

The Qur'ān has not been revealed just for memorisation nor for being recorded in writing. More importantly, people should study and recite it. It should lead to a change in their beliefs. Those studying it should be purified and reformed. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) accomplished this task. His Companions are a living testament to the training imparted by him.

The Messenger's other assignments were to instruct people in the Qur'ān and wisdom. The latter stands for excellent morals and manners. According to Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, the expression *ḥikmah* is used throughout the Qur'ān in the sense of good conduct. The same refers to the Qur'ānic assertion that Luqmān was granted enviable morals and manners. In *Sūrah al-Isrā'* there is a detailed account of good morals and manners. In conclusion it is said that all these directives are revealed by Allah.

In instructing people in the Qur'ān, the Messenger elucidated the import of the Qur'ān, amplified the treasures of knowledge contained therein and explained the purpose of the Qur'ān's revelation. He developed such an understanding among his listeners that they grasped the message of faith. Allah infused insights into faith in him to whom He intended to do good.

The above passage thus brings out the role and responsibilities of the Messenger. In institutions of Islamic learning such scholars should be trained who may recite and teach the Qur'ān and instruct people in good conduct and purify them. Neither of these should be disregarded, for they help the individual attain self-control. As a result, no amount of wealth or any worldly honour can distract believers from their main mission.

3. The Place of knowledge

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾
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(*al-ʿAlaq* 96:1-5)

The above verses readily bring to mind the event which happened in a dry, desolate part of Arabia some fourteen hundred years ago. This single event changed the entire course of human history. Nay, it transformed the fate of the whole of mankind. This event is closely related to the pen and tablet, for it laid the foundations of knowledge, scholarship and civilisation. Had Islam not made its appearance, great seats of learning would not have come into existence. Nor would huge

libraries have been established, which lend colour and meaning to life. The obvious reference in the verses is to the event of the divine revelation sent for the first time to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) on 6 August 610 CE in the Ḥirā' Cave in Makkah. This represents the earliest piece of revelation received by the Prophet.

Even in this first instalment the Creator of the universe made it plain that the new faith was inextricably linked with the pen or knowledge. The unlettered Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was blessed with divine revelation in the loneliness of the Ḥirā' Cave. He was granted a charter for the guidance of mankind. Nonetheless, the recipient of this message was an unlettered person, not knowing how to read or write. This was an unprecedented event in history: an unlettered person amidst a throng of illiterate people bringing about a revolution. Revelation was sent there to that part of the world after a long interval spanning some six hundred years. It commenced with the directive to recite, not to worship Allah. People were asked not to offer Prayer. They were instead first instructed in reciting.

An unlettered person was blessed with revelation and directed to recite. Implicit in this was the message that his community would not only spread knowledge far and wide, but it would also usher mankind into a phase characterised by knowledge, reason, wisdom, a constructive approach, humanism and all-round progress. This would put an end to ignorance, barbarism and error.

Significantly enough, recitation would be made in the name of the Lord Who created everything. A major flaw in the then existing order was that the nexus between knowledge and the Lord had been snapped. As a result, error had made its way into knowledge. Islam restored this important link. Man was reminded that knowledge should be permeated with God-consciousness. For He has bestowed all knowledge. Everything owes its existence to Him. Therefore, under divine guidance alone can knowledge remain on the right track. This was the radical message of the day. It was something inconceivable in the pre-Islamic world. If all the intellectuals of the day were asked to

guess as to what would constitute the first revelation, they could never have anticipated that it would focus on recitation and knowledge. For such a concept was unknown to the illiterate Arabs. The Qur'ānic expression in this opening verse covers all forms of knowledge and all modes of acquiring it. It is not specific to the variety obtained from revelation and scripture. Rather, it includes man's intellectual heritage and mental faculties as well.

In Islam knowledge cannot be divorced from faith. As Muslims were directed first to recite, they could not neglect knowledge. Such are not true Muslims who disregard knowledge. They are not representative of Islam. Knowledge, as the Qur'ān directs, should be pursued under the guidance of the All-Wise and All-Knowing Allah. For it is a difficult path, full of hazards and pitfalls. Man is liable to be misled at every stage. It is therefore imperative that this goal be pursued under divine supervision.

Allah does not direct the pursuit of knowledge in an absolute sense. Applied branches of knowledge are not intended by this instruction. The same holds true for the leisure and entertainment industry. The Qur'ān forbids such knowledge that leads to mutual hostility and wars, nor should knowledge be abused to meet material needs alone, and nor does it consist in linguistic skills either. Allah being man's Creator is fully aware of man's needs and weaknesses. The first revelation accords prominence to the pen, though this was highly uncommon in the then Makkah. Only a few scribes there possessed such skills and reference to the pen in the Arabic poetry of the day is almost non-existent.

Another radical and eternal truth enunciated by the Qur'ān is that knowledge is inexhaustible. For the Qur'ān says that it includes all that which man did not know. Recent advances in transport, communication and energy are implied by this Qur'ānic account too. Needless to add, man was ignorant of all this until Allah guided him to unravel it.

4. The Usefulness of *Madrasahs*

وَمَا كَانَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا۟ كَآفَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ
طَآئِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا۟ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا۟ قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِمْ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

And it is not for the believers to march forth all together. So why should not a group from each party of them march forth and the rest get instruction in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them? Maybe they will take heed.

(*al-Tawbah* 9:122)

Were someone to ask me whether the Qur'ān mentions *Madrasahs* (institutions of Islamic learning) and their role and responsibilities, the answer would be in the affirmative. For the above verse outlines their assignment. The Qur'ān clarifies that since it is not practically possible for all Muslims to acquire religious education, there should be, at least, a group of dedicated Muslims who do take it up. They should move abroad, gaining a deeper understanding of faith at the feet of '*Ulamā*' in various towns and cities and on their return they should prepare their fellow Muslims better to meet the challenges Islam presents. This is exactly the role of the *Madrasah*. It should train such graduates who are aware of contemporary issues and challenges and who are ready to take these on.

Although the verse does not pointedly employ the expression *Madrasah*, what it says is fully applicable to the *Madrasah*, its need and relevance and its duty. At the outset it is acknowledged that all Muslims cannot so go and study. For it is neither easy nor physically possible. It would amount to turning a blind eye to ground realities, if all Muslims were charged with this duty. It would be unnatural to assume that all Muslims could abandon their hearth and home to pursue religious studies. For it would spell an end to local industry and business. Rather such a move would paralyse life. Hence it is impossible to expect that everyone could join the *Madrasah* as a

student. Furthermore, Allah does not demand of believers something which is impossible or impractical. Allah, being man's Creator, is fully conversant with his limitations. He has placed some shortcomings as innate in human nature. He knows well the human condition. Therefore, He does not oblige man to do what is beyond him. It is against this backdrop that the Qur'ān states that all Muslims cannot enrol in the *Madrasah*. Allah has not charged each and every Muslim with this duty. This is also a pre-emptive strike lest someone plead that he could not do so owing to his circumstances.

However, the Qur'ān insists that some Muslims from each town should dedicate themselves to this task of gaining religious knowledge. Some members from each locality, each profession, each town and each country should make the pursuit of religious education their life-long mission. They should develop a broad and deep understanding of faith.

Gaining insight into faith is a huge task. Included in this is knowledge of divine commands, their rationale and their application in varying situations. The Qur'ān uses an apt word, *tafaqquh*, in this context. Students are expected to learn faith in depth, have a broad view of faith and be able to relate faith to the changing times. They are also obliged to preach faith and warn fellow Muslims. They should not confine their knowledge to themselves. Rather, they should transmit it on a wide scale. More importantly, they should admonish their community, containing as it does people of all religions, nationalities and cultures. It is not intended that Arabs should address only Arabs. Rather, they should preach faith to everyone, of every family, locality, town and country.

The verse also lays down the objectives of this exercise. These dedicated persons should master religious knowledge, gain insight into it and spread it far and wide. If Allah intends to do good to someone, He blesses him with insights into faith. Included in this are all religious commands and issues, their rationale, their application and exceptions. Such people should also first mend their own conduct which will ensure their deliverance.

It is the duty of these religious scholars to preach divine guidance in every locality. They should exhort people to take heed and warn them against the dangers and challenges to their faith. They should alert them against such beliefs and deeds which may place them outside the fold of faith. For men are apt to commit such deeds which may be injurious to their faith. They may even lose their faith altogether. The Qur'ān therefore charges these religious scholars with the duty to admonish them. They should clarify for them the limits beyond which they should not go. Their role thus consists in advising and warning. For, Allah has clearly spelled out the way of guidance as distinct from the path of rebellion and wickedness. Whoever disbelieves or follows *ṭāghūt*, is accountable for the same. On the contrary, one who believes in Allah achieves His firm support that guides one all along. This fundamental truth is stated in verse 256 of *al-Baqarah*. These religious scholars should identify what is evil and wicked and what constitutes Islam. People are of course free to act as they like, after being told so. Religious scholars are asked to admonish people so that they avoid self-destruction. This statement is based on the principle of cause and effect. Their instruction will help people lead a pious life, for by this they will recognise what is lawful and what is not. They will readily know what will help them attain divine forgiveness and salvation and what will land them in eternal punishment. This is the thrust of the verse.

Nonetheless, another point worth noting is that whereas faith is eternal, times are ever-changing. Notwithstanding the change in times and circumstances, the basic principles of faith being eternal do not undergo any alteration. Those equipped with sound religious knowledge gain the ability to provide a link between faith and the ever-changing needs and demands of the times. They perform this duty in addition to preaching faith and warning people.

They see to it that no alteration takes place with regard to the essence and basic duties of faith. They are very particular about the spirit and dictates of faith. Yet they make faith compatible with changing times. They thus guide and lead people notwithstanding the

phenomenal advances in knowledge, technology, culture, transport and communication. They are equipped to demonstrate the relevance of faith. They can lead their society intellectually. They prove how faith can resolve the problems confronting them. So doing, they highlight the life-enriching role of faith. This, in turn, saves mankind from following the path of self-destruction. Faith never becomes outdated no matter what developments take place in various fields of human activity. For, by definition and in its effect faith is eternal. It is fallacious to regard faith as an out-of-date entity. Times, no doubt, change. This is something perfectly natural. It does not represent some sort of disaster. Time is not a fossil. Life changes and assumes numerous new visages with the passage of time. In contrast, faith is universal and eternal, unaffected by the vagaries of time.

The main role of the *Madrasah* is to maintain and deliver the above message. They should ensure that faith is preserved in its purity. Faith should be the same as it was professed and practised by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the early Muslims. Faith has been followed consistently. Those actively associated with the *Madrasah* should not, however, disregard changing times altogether. They should instead critically analyse needs and challenges. They should make the most of the new opportunities and make as much allowance as is possible for the new situation.

Faith should be maintained and at the same time it should provide intellectual leadership. Pious scholars should carefully evaluate new developments and appreciate new demands. They should meet these demands while adhering to the spirit of faith and the *Sharīʿah*. In this lies the meaning and scope of *tafaqquh*. The next stage in this direction is of *ijtihād* which calls for specialised qualifications.

In establishing, managing and orienting the *Madrasah* the above points should be taken into account. All praise be to Allah at the beginning and at the end, and both outwardly and inwardly.

5. The Obligation to provide Moral Training

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ قُوٓاْ أَنفُسَكُمۡ وَأَهۡلِيكُمۡ نَارٗا وَقُودُهَا ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱلۡحِجَارَةُ عَلَيۡهَا مَلَٰٓئِكَةٌ غِلَاظٞ شِدَادٞ لَّا يَعۡصُونَ ٱللَّهَ مَآ أَمَرَهُمۡ وَيَفۡعَلُونَ مَا يُؤۡمَرُونَ ٦

O Believers! Guard yourselves and your family members against the Fire, of which the fuel is mankind and stones. Over it are angels, stern and strong. They do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and they do what they are commanded.

(*al-Taḥrīm* 66:6)

A dire warning is delivered through this verse. Since man is apt to forget things, it would be in the fitness of things, for the above verse to be displayed in bold letters in mosques and other public places to serve as a reminder.

The verse addressed the believers, those who have already professed faith. That it is not directed at those who designate Muslims themselves is not a matter of chance. Rather, the focus of attention is on those who embrace faith. Yet they too are asked to guard themselves, their family members and those under their care against the Hellfire, of which men and stones are fuel.

This verse was addressed to the Muslims, known as the Prophet's Companions. Apart from these immediate addressees, it is directed at all those who call themselves Muslims until the Last Day. Yet the immediate addressees were those who had pledged faith at the Prophet's hand. They enjoyed the privilege of being his Companions. Some were the fortunate ones who had pledged their fealty to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) under a tree at the pledge of Riḍwān during the Ḥudaybiyyah Treaty. Regarding them the Qur'ān declares: *Allah was assuredly well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [O Prophet] under the tree. And He knew what*

was in their hearts. So He sent down on them tranquillity and rewarded them with the imminent victory. (*al-Fatḥ* 48:18)

Among those immediate addressees were those who had been told that Allah is pleased with them. Yet even such high-ranking Companions are warned in the verse to guard themselves. Also included among them are the ten fortunate Companions who had been given the glad tiding during their lifetimes of their entry into Paradise. Also included among them were those noble souls who had participated in the battles of Badr and Uḥud.

It is pointless asking whether one would throw one's own family members into the Fire. The very thought of it is out of the question. Yet Allah tells the believers to save themselves from Hellfire. No Companion had ever thought of consigning his children to fire, nor could they be mute spectators should any of their children leap into a fire. Actually they could not reconcile themselves to any situation which posed a threat to their families. Nonetheless, the believers are clearly asked to guard themselves and their family. This, then, was not a real life situation against which they had to be alert.

Rather, the thrust of the verse tells these believers to desist from any deed which could land them and their family members in Hellfire. They are unmistakably warned against Hell. It is natural for parents to defend their children. Accordingly, they are informed here of things which could drive them and their children into Hellfire. There are certain causes which lead to definite results. For example, inducing a poison or fatal substance into someone is bound to kill them, for the perpetrator opted for a method which definitely brings about death. Therefore, such an offender is treated as a killer, a murderer. Employing the same logic, this Qur'ānic verse warns against such deeds which are destined to land man in Hellfire.

The situation prevailing today is one whereby we are guilty of driving our children to Hellfire. For there exist no arrangements for the religious education of our children. We have left them to the mercy of the prevailing milieu, which is godless. The present educational system does not claim that it will impart such education as ensures

their deliverance in the Hereafter. These schools do not prescribe the teachings of messengers. If our children are ignorant of divine guidance, their faith is in peril. They are destined to suffer in the Hereafter. Given this, it is hard to justify our attitude. How can we reconcile ourselves to the present situation? The present educational system, at least in India, is not secular; it has a particular goal of infusing Hindu mythology into the supple minds of children. In the British India, education was, no doubt, secular. The syllabus at that time contained inane stories of animals. Those who studied under that system will bear this out. The textbooks in British India did not however interfere with students' faith. They did not evoke holiness for certain creatures, nor did these ascribe divinity to anyone in particular. Children read stories about popular animals. In sum, the syllabus then did not have any bearing on faith.

Today it is an altogether different scenario. Present-day textbooks contain lessons and stories which tamper with children's faith. What is implicit in these is elaborated upon by teachers. Likewise, children participate in certain activities which run counter to the Islamic doctrine of pure, unadulterated monotheism.

If we enroll our children in a school and make no other arrangement for their religious education, we indirectly encourage our children to imbibe an un-Islamic worldview. If our children do not learn Urdu, cannot study religious texts and do not attend an Islamic educational institution in the evenings, we stand guilty of not guarding ourselves and our children against Hellfire. The verse in question here then is directly addressed to us all.

Man is apt to look for escape routes. However, we must realise that Allah is All-Knowing. Being man's Creator Allah is All-Aware. Man is also apt to suffer from the delusion that he does not need to make elaborate preparations for the Hereafter. For he may after all find some other way out. Or he may entertain some miraculous escape, or resort to bribery. Allah being All-Aware, especially of human nature, slams the door on all these, saying that His angels oversee Hell and that they are stern and strong. Thus man has no chance to escape.

No one can defend themselves or their family members in view of the presence of stern and strong angels. The Qur'ān employs very strong expressions to describe these angels. Moreover, they are dutiful in the extreme. They do not disobey Allah even in the slightest.

The important point, therefore, is that we should arrange for the Islamic education and moral training of our children. They should be instructed in matters of faith so that they can be saved from Hellfire. Such arrangements will keep them away from Allah's wrath and will help them lead a life in accordance with divine guidance. They will thus enjoy an enviable life and earn deliverance and success in the Next.

6. Imparting education in Science and Technology

وَأَنزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَن يَنصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

And We sent down iron in which is great violence and also advantages to mankind, and that Allah may find out who helps Allah, unseen and His Messengers. Certainly Allah is the Strongest, the Almighty.

(*al-Ḥadīd* 57:25)

Many people, especially Western educated ones, think that the Qur'ān makes no reference to science or industry. However, the Qur'ān does speak of master architects who not only served mankind, but who also defended their co-religionists and community members. Such thoughts hardly cross people's mind insofar as their perception of the Qur'ān is concerned.

While recounting His favours Allah makes particular mention of iron. The Qur'ān pointedly says that Allah sent it down. It is

not mentioned in passing as one of His numerous created things. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the divine power and mercy in blessing mankind with this bounty. Architecture is part of technology. Iron plays an important role in architecture, warfare and activities related to defence and combat. Without iron no industry can flourish.

Of many minerals, the Qur'ān picks upon iron, proclaiming that Allah sent it down. It is also stressed that iron contains numerous advantages. It represents a sign of Allah's Lordship. It has many constructive and beneficial uses, apart from its obvious use in manufacturing weapons. The Qur'ān draws attention then to its very many benefits.

Furthermore, the Prophet David (peace and blessings be upon him) is specifically referred to as being taught by Allah how to make coats of mail to defend the human body. Iron was thus put at his disposal so that he could use it constructively. Each expression of the above verse conveys a wealth of meaning.

Reference is also made to another of Allah's Messengers, namely the Prophet Solomon, son of the Prophet David (peace and blessings be upon them). He had a retinue of attendants, including *jinn* who acted on his orders. The latter accomplished much in the field of architecture and industry at Solomon's command. Significantly enough, all these activities were markedly constructive. Under the Prophet Solomon's leadership the *jinn* were engaged in beneficial acts. They did what he willed. He utilised them to spread his mission. Today natural resources are abused for destruction. By contrast, men and *jinn* in the Prophet Solomon's day were not absolutely free to do what they liked. They did not invade, destroy and usurp others' belongings.

7. The *'Ulamā'* as trainers

كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

Be you faithful servants of Allah because you teach the Book and because you study it.

(*Āl 'Imrān* 3:79)

For the wealth of meaning it embodies, this verse stands out as a miracle in itself. In short, Allah asks men to become His faithful servants. They are then able to train and guide others. They must however maintain a close and constant link with their Lord. More importantly, they should be characterised by sincerity, unwavering faith and a commitment to reform others.

As a student of the Arabic language I was struck by the choice of the expression *al-Rabbāniyyūn* for *'Ulamā'*. *Rabb* is one of the excellent names of Allah. Implicit in this is the connotation of training and guiding. Allah guides them to devote themselves to faith and its preaching. He also instructs them in adhering to the *Shari'ah* and *Sunnah*. Faith and devotion are their hallmarks. They are engaged in this noble cause only to win Allah's pleasure, reposing their trust in His absolute power and help. They also look forward to His rewards.

'Ulamā' are directed to teach the Book to people. This should be, however, accompanied by their own study of the Book. Even after attaining the designation of *'Ulamā'* it is incumbent upon them to continue their studies and constantly refresh their knowledge. In essence, they should strive for academic excellence.

'Ulamā' are the custodians and representatives of faith and interpreters of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. They invite people to the way of truth. For *'Ulamā'* and their training centres, *Madrasahs*, the above verse is full of meaning and message. It gives them many directives and admonitions. *'Ulamā'* should be guided all along by the Qur'ān and devote themselves heart and soul to it. They should be

fully cognisant of their role and responsibilities. On the one hand, they should be thoroughly grounded in knowledge and be fully conversant with Islamic learning. Their knowledge should be deep and firm. On the other, their deeds should always conform to the *Sharīʿah*. Their worship and conduct should go hand in hand. A keen sense of accountability should permeate this conduct. Their study should be prompted by the desire to earn Allah's pleasure. Their energy should centre on promoting faith. They should not be carried away by lucrative offers which steer them elsewhere. Presently many people go to the Middle East only to seek a good job and so doing, they abuse the *Ḥajj* and *ʿUmrah* visa. They accept petty jobs in the hope that one day they will secure better jobs. Accepting jobs in mosques to lead prayers and to call the *adhān* are part of the same mercenary outlook on life.

This verse then encapsulates an eternal truth. Allah will keep on raising *ʿUlamā'* until the Last Day. There is a need for such *ʿUlamā'* who can impart spiritual training and religious instruction, and who strive for faith. Given this, the verse is a miracle unto itself for it presents this life-giving message.

[VII]

Commandments

1. Islam in totality

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱدۡخُلُواْ فِي ٱلسِّلۡمِ كَآفَّةٗ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُواْ خُطُوَٰتِ
ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمۡ عَدُوّٞ مُّبِينٞ ٢٠٨

O Believers! Enter into Islam wholly and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Surely he is an open enemy to you.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:208)

This verse, though brief, contains a broad message for man, especially the Muslim community. Contained in it is much food for thought, for here Allah asks believers to be imbued with Islam in full. Another significant directive is to shun Satan's footsteps in that he is man's open enemy.

Let us first explain what is meant by Islam. Many people who have not conducted a study of comparative religions fail to appreciate the fundamental truth that Islam is a set of beliefs and a complete way of life. Other religions are named after their founders or their ethnic origin. Take the example of Judaism, which is named after YeHuda, a member of the Prophet's family. Christianity owes its name to Jesus Christ. Parsis are named after Fāris, the old name

of Iran, which was the birthplace of their religion. None of these religions represents an extensive call to believe in God or a way of life. Hinduism takes its name from Sindh, and Brahamanism after a particular class. Buddhism too owes its name to its founder, Gautama Buddha. So is the case with Jainism. In contrast to all these, Islam is the only faith that prescribes a way of life and derives its message from the Scripture and the Messenger. It is based solely on divine revelation. The *Sharī'ah* stands for His commands. Islam is a set of beliefs and the *Sharī'ah*. In this respect it is unique, distinct from all other religions.

Little wonder then that Allah asks Muslims to imbibe Islam wholly. They should be obedient and submissive to Him in their beliefs, religious duties, way of life and social norms. They must adhere to the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). In their social relations they should ensure that they do not become loyal and obedient to those who are Allah's enemy.

Islam is derived from an Arabic expression which means to surrender. A Muslim forgoes all that he has, his desires, his interests and his priorities for the sake of his faith. He submits himself fully to Allah. This is Allah's demand, going by the above definition, that Muslims should practise Islam in full. They should not have any mental reservations about their faith. They should promote Islam all along. The Qur'ān explicitly demands that Muslims accept Islam in full. They are not free to accept it selectively. In their acts of worship, way of life, social relations, mutual obligations and rights and laws they should be governed by Islam. The followers of other religions can however make selections. Muslims though are asked to practise Islam in full. They should not be negligent in the slightest. The Qur'ān thus lays down this standing principle, which makes no allowance or exemption. The élite and the educated cannot expect any allowance, from this, nor do the nobility enjoy any exemption. Even rulers are as much bound to Islam as commoners. A mighty emperor, a distinguished military commander, a competent legislator and a legendary victor must adhere to Islam in equal measure. No

one can plead that he has no time to offer prayers or to perform *Ḥajj*. For one who can afford to go on pilgrimage is not allowed to neglect this duty.

In like manner, all Muslims are governed by the same set of divine laws. They must, for example, observe the Islamic laws on inheritance. This should then make us think about the nature of Islam.

The Qur'ānic demand is not restricted to accepting Islam. It asks that Islam must be followed in full. Some people might claim to profess Islam yet ask for allowances to protect their self-interests. They may show a readiness to accept the articles of the Islamic faith such as monotheism, the Hereafter, and divine judgement in the Next Life, yet insist that they can act as they like in their social and family lives and with regard to ties of kith and kin, and in business transactions. Allah does not however accept such a proposition. The above verse rules out this approach altogether. For it demands believers practise Islam in full. Believers should not only go to the mosque and offer prayers they should also profess and practise Islam in full.

Equally pithy is the other Qur'ānic directive: "*Do not follow the footsteps of Satan.*" Thus any failure to practise Islam in full results in one's following Satan. Around us we see everywhere people pursuing Satan's footsteps. Indulging in usury, taking and giving loans at exorbitant rates and seeking false glory and honour are its manifestations. We tend to spend our life savings on marriage parties only for show. We also take great pride in arranging sumptuous dinner parties and in staying at five-star hotels. All these are unmistakable signs of following Satan's footsteps. Allah, however, warns us against this, stressing that Satan is our open enemy.

It is also significant that the plural form is used for Satan's footsteps. Numerous are the forms of error, related to beliefs, deeds, morals and manners, whether in socio-cultural or political life.

We must therefore engrave the message of this verse on our hearts and minds. It is a powerful verse, reflective of Allah's glory. Man is thus warned of Allah's wrath, and the message is delivered in unmistakable and unequivocal language.

2. The Need for a change in character

وَقُل رَّبِّ أَدْخِلْنِي مُدْخَلَ صِدْقٍ وَأَخْرِجْنِي مُخْرَجَ صِدْقٍ ... ﴿٨٠﴾

And say: O my Lord! Cause me to enter a rightful entrance and cause me to go forth a rightful outgoing.

(*al-Isrā'* 17:80)

Character is much more precious than even a vast empire. For good character helps one gain the gnosis of Allah. In turn, one is blessed with His guidance and mercy. By comparison, an empire is something material and ephemeral, whereas good character resting on firm faith enables one to conquer everything – one's own self and all that exists in the universe. It grants such victory against which all worldly conquests pale. If one's intention is pious and sincere, it helps establish huge institutions. Left to their own devices institutions are subject to decay and fall. In contrast, sincere intention leads one to the way of Allah. One is guided fully to adhere to the *Sharī'ah*. One's deeds are thus in line with divine will. With such an outlook one can conquer everything. A true believer is not overawed by worldly glory and pomp.

When Allah wills, an empire comes into existence. His command controls everything. It is on record that resourceless spiritual masters had worldly kings and emperors at their beck and call. On reading the account of Khawājah Burhān al-Dīn and Khawājah Zayn al-Dīn, one realises the truth of this statement. Once a mighty king summoned Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn. The latter, so offended at this retired to the *vicinity* of Khawājah Burhān al-Dīn, openly challenging that no one could remove him from there. Eventually the king relented. Instances of the above import abound in history.

Character building should be our main concern. One's movements should be governed by Allah's commands, as is stated in the above verse. In such a case one is reinforced by Allah. For there is no one besides Allah to offer help. Muslims owe their strength to divine

support alone. For empires do not survive and even the Caliphate under the Rightly-Guided Caliphs came to an end. The same happened to the ʿAbbāsid Empire which extended from Asia to Africa, as too with the Mughals. If one is blessed with empire by Allah, one should make the most of it for it is not something which is degrading. However, empire is not the main concern of Muslims, nor does the fall of an empire spell the death of the entire Muslim community. Nor can an empire revive and rejuvenate Muslims. The Muslim community is above empire. The former is meant for the latter, not *vice versa*. Good character produces empires aplenty. Good character is dear to Allah. As a reward for it, Allah may confer an empire on someone. Take the Prophet Solomon's example as illustrative.

What is really important is that one's movements, life and death should only be for Allah's sake. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was instructed in the same thus: *Say: Surely my prayers and my rites and my life and my death are all for Allah, Lord of the worlds. He does not have any partner. I am commanded to this, and I am the first of Muslims.* (*al-Anʿām* 6:162-163)

A Muslim's life should be governed by the *Sharīʿah*. He should live by the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*. The Prophet's exemplary life should be his role model. His own desires and interests should not dictate his actions. This is the import of the verse: "*O my Lord! Cause me to enter a rightful entrance and cause me to go forth a rightful outgoing.*"

Each and every action done by us should be prompted by the *Sharīʿah*. We should be concerned all along about Allah's commands. We must submit ourselves as and when Allah asks us. This was the practice of the Prophet's Companions for they only acted through the *Sharīʿah*. Their conduct, whether lenient or stern, was governed by divine command.

The Qur'ān is the eternal guidance for mankind. It clearly states what Allah asks us to do. We should strive to develop our Islamic spirit. Implied in this is suppressing our selfish interests, our desire for name and fame and replacing these with adherence to the *Sharīʿah*. All false notions of worldly honour and glory are hollow, for the

deciding factor in a given situation is Allah's command. We should ascertain how Allah wants us to lead out lives, and interest of Islam should be uppermost in our minds. Divine reward should be our only concern. All our striving, economic and political, should centre on this goal.

There are millions of Muslims in many Muslim countries today. However, they are not particular about the call to preach Islam. They do not go forth to help the dying humanity in the West or Arabia. Rather, they are driven by their own economic interests. They go out only in the face of economic compulsion. They freely move with only this consideration. For their own lucrative benefits they abandon Makkah and move to New York. Their visit to Makkah is not prompted by any desire to reap religious and spiritual benefits from the Sacred Mosque there. Rather, economic interest dictates their migration to Makkah and from there further afield. Thus, they do not enter or exit in accordance with the divine command. So doing they disregard the divine command which was given to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

Let us supplicate to Allah that all of our movements be for His sake alone. Let our life and death, our social life and our mutual relations be governed by Allah's commands. We are destined to be rewarded by Allah, if we act in this manner. Our malaise is the loss of our character. Our mindsets have changed so much that we do not adhere any longer to the *Sharīʿah*. We are not governed by the dictates of the *Sharīʿah*. Instead we are swayed by whim and selfish desire. What we need most is to build our character in accordance with the *Sharīʿah*. We should live our lives in line with the directives of Allah and His Messenger. Our likes and dislikes should conform to the *Sharīʿah*. This is the abiding message of the verse quoted at the beginning of this piece.

If Muslims collectively opt for a way of life based on the *Sharīʿah*, it would transform them altogether. It would infuse into them Islamic character. We should strive to achieve this goal at both individual and collective levels. Let all of us resolve to accord priority to the

Sharīʿah. In all walks of life, be it in elections, politics, marriage and birth rites, the construction of a house, the division of inheritance and food habits, we should take our guidance from the *Sharīʿah*.

This is the need of the hour. For without this change of heart we cannot obtain success. Since Allah prescribed this way for His beloved Messenger, we being members of his community are obliged to follow the same path.

3. Muslims' abiding strength

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِن تَتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنكُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلْفَضْلِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢٩﴾

O Believers! If you fear Allah, He will make for you a distinction and will expiate for you your misdeeds and forgive you. And Allah is the owner of mighty grace.

(*al-Anfāl* 8:29)

A Muslim has two roles. As an ordinary human being he is born in this world according to the divinely-ordained laws of nature. He resembles any other human being in his body, limbs, human weaknesses and physical ailments. He has all these features in common with all other men. In line with the laws of nature, once again, he grows into an adult and turns old. At his appointed hour, be it in youth or old age, he will die, no matter whether he be a devout person, a great scholar, a distinguished writer, philosopher, thinker, intellectual, or spiritual master. He has to leave this world. For Allah has declared that man is mortal. Given this, Muslims are not an exception to divine law.

In other respects, however, a Muslim attains uniqueness and distinction if he adheres to his faith. In this case he develops proximity with Allah. Allah may thus suspend or defer for the time being His

laws in such a person's case. For Allah grants a true believer honour, victory and fame for he is true to his pledge with his faith and the *Sharī'ah*, and if he instinctively obeys divine commands.

Faith and piety may be gained consciously. One is not born with these. It depends on one's intention and effort to develop such faith and piety. An instance in point is of a torch and its battery. With the latter the former works very well, far better than an empty torch. It is called a torch only when the battery is inside it. A torch, it goes without saying, provides light and overcomes darkness. Equipped with a torch and led by its light one is not likely to stumble in darkness. Nor will one collide with a wall on the way, or mistakenly trample on someone. A torch is thus of much assistance.

In this respect, the following Qur'ānic passage is worth considering: *Is he who was dead and We resurrected him, and appointed for him a light with which he walks among mankind, like him who is in darkness from which he cannot emerge?* (*al-An'ām* 6:122)

Allah brings home the truth clearly and cogently in this passage. One who was dead was revived by Him. Furthermore, He provided him with a light, with which he walks comfortably among people. He is definitely different from him who gropes in the darkness, unable to find his way.

Let us resume our analogy of the torch with its battery. The battery in the case of a believer is provided by the Prophet's teachings. After the Prophet Muḥammad's demise, no fresh supply of batteries was possible. One cannot obtain these anywhere. Only what the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) taught can guide man. If one is guided by his message, one will walk in light, without difficulty. One will easily find one's way, as also guide others as well. Islam is the battery for man's guidance. Others, who lack this battery are blind, unable to find their way. A Muslim's distinction consists in his being blessed with divine guidance. Allah has promised believers a criterion, if they fear Him and adhere to His way.

Muslims are promised a distinction, which will exalt their rank. It will help them overcome lowliness and attain heights of glory.

Those who deprive themselves of the light provided by Allah have no chance of success. They are without inner strength.

The true distinction of Muslims which serves as their battery is their adherence to the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) imparted to him by Allah. His message appeals to man's heart and mind. It is directly related to his conscience and his mental faculties. It produces in him a certain moral outlook. Moreover, in its light a Muslim leads life in a particular way. He learns how to behave with his fellow human beings. He gains the gnosis of Allah, develops love for His creatures, and entertains a fear of Allah. His main characteristics are: fear of Allah and love for Him, as also sympathy for his fellow human beings. He takes pity on the poor, shuns dishonesty and theft, and stays clear from crime and injustice. In sum, the message of Islam transforms him. This transformation is on account of his adherence to Islam.

If Muslims deviate from the message of Islam, this amounts to self-destruction. It is a simple case of deliberately committing suicide. If a Muslim is not characterised by the features special to Islam, he does not have any distinctive mark. For Allah plainly states that if Muslims fear Allah, He will bless them with distinction. Muslims are thus urged to fear Allah and lead a pious life. If they act on the Prophet's teachings, this will make them pious. Piety is generally construed as one's devotion to prayers throughout the night. However, piety rather consists in refraining from what is forbidden by Allah and His Messenger. Even the thought of evil should not cross a Muslim's mind. He should seek Allah's refuge from anything unlawful. He is obliged to follow what he is commanded. Even the largest empire on earth pales into insignificance in comparison to the message of Islam. If a Muslim is offered Korah's treasures, he should abandon these in preference to divine teachings. The really precious possession is the Prophet's message and the distinction bestowed by Allah on those who adhere to Islam. This is an evidently plain truth. It is no mystery to assert that Muslims' abiding distinction, strength and exalted rank consists in their observance of Islam. As long as they

are true to their faith, they are distinctive and indomitable. No one can thwart their onward march.

Muslims owe their distinction to their adherence to their faith, morals and manners, noble objectives and purpose of life. Allah will grant them distinction, contingent on their loyalty to faith. Studded with faith they stand out above everyone else. They are bound to earn honour and success, if they are sincere to their faith.

Allah exhorts Muslims to lead a pious life. Piety stands for consistency and resolve in practising the *Sharīʿah*. Muslims will be blessed with piety, if they conform to the *Sharīʿah*. Allah will bless such with distinction and confer honour upon them.

Muslims will be granted a light, with which they will advance unhampered. They will be welcomed as Allah's obedient servants. The verse quoted above thus contains a significant glad tiding. It guarantees success and honour to Muslims. Above all, it promises them a reward. Let it be realised that this promise is made by the Creator of the universe. Muslims are promised a mark of distinction, provided that they lead a pious life.

Such promised distinction may be defined as unique strength which will be bestowed on Muslims. This will make them stand out. They will serve as guides for mankind. Allah has promised this unique reward to Muslims. Nonetheless, it should be realised that this privilege is in return for piety. As already indicated, piety rests in following the *Sharīʿah* and leading life in strict conformity with it.

4. Allah as the Protecting Guardian

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾

We have sent down the Admonition [the Qur'ān], and We are its Protecting Guardian.

(*al-Ḥijr* 15:9)

The above verse represents an important proclamation, a glad tiding and a guarantee. This proclamation should alert everyone, for it is marked by universality. Furthermore, it is a very emphatic statement, characterised by resolve and conviction. It should draw, in particular, the attention of all Muslims.

Allah declares that He has revealed the Admonition. To the best of my study of *Tafsīr*, this refers to the Qur'ān. In other words, Allah issues the edict that He has sent down the Qur'ān. This use of the personal pronoun in the plural, which is special to royal edicts, is worth noting.

Those conversant with Arabic idiom can better appreciate the stylistic features of the statement that Allah is the Protecting Guardian of the Qur'ān. The emphasis is unmistakable. What is said is that Allah will definitely preserve it. Many points reinforcing such stress and emphasis occur in the original Arabic. Students of Arabic grammar and syntax will readily identify these.

The verse is quite succinct. We may have recited and listened to it several times, yet we cannot claim to gather its full meaning. For its wide coverage of relevant material the verse deserves to be studied in depth.

First, it is stressed that Allah has revealed the Qur'ān. This is followed by His proclamation regarding its preservation. No such proclamation has been made about other scriptures – the Torah and the Gospels. Regarding these the Qur'ān says: *They [the rabbis and divines] judged by what was committed to their keeping of the Book of Allah, and to which they were witnesses.* (*al-Mā'idah* 5:44)

Allah did no undertake the responsibility to guard the Torah and the Gospels. This task was assigned to the adherents of these faiths. It is on record, especially in light of the latest studies, that these books are not preserved in their purity. This happened because Allah assigned their preservation to the followers of these faiths. As regards the Qur'ān, however, it is categorically stated that Allah is its Protecting Guardian.

Although this verse does not specifically allude to the Qur'ān's remarkable preservation, it nonetheless refers to the divine promise regarding this. It is, in essence, a glad tiding for us. Furthermore, it defines the role and valuable task of *'Ulamā'* and *Madrasahs*.

While proclaiming the preservation of the Qur'ān, Allah has spelled out the role, scope and responsibility of *Madrasahs*. These are the means through which its preservation is guaranteed.

It is beyond any shadow of a doubt that Allah has sent down the Qur'ān as an admonition and a reminder, and that is His promise. It cannot however be inferred from this that the Qur'ān will be preserved only as a book in some library. Rather, that He has proclaimed with all His might and glory that He will protect the Qur'ān clearly means that it will not be so confined to some library or other. Rather, it will be an essential part of human consciousness. Men will memorise it by heart and recite it daily and more particularly on Ramaḍān nights.

Allah's divine promise, however, goes beyond this. Implicit in it is also the announcement that He will always keep alive its meaning and message. He will ensure that some people always act on it. Moreover, those safeguarding it will also be protected by Him. He will bestow honour and glory on those who recite and follow it. He will grant continuity to its scholars. Furthermore, the language in which it was revealed will also be preserved. All related disciplines, which are essential for studying the Qur'ān, will be preserved as well. The holy sites where it was sent down will also be maintained.

Included in the above divine promise is the assertion that the Arabic language with its original syntax and grammar will be there as long as Allah wants Islam and the Qur'ān to flourish. This declaration is not some worldly charter decreed by some ruler or world body like the UNO. It is unmistakably a divine proclamation.

Going a step further, it may be asserted that Muslims living in different parts of the world are under Allah's protection, as part of this promise. They have His divine guarantee, as long as they adhere to the Qur'ānic teachings. If they remain devoted to preaching and

disseminating the message of the Qur'ān, and are engaged in teaching and studying it, they will enjoy Allah's protection. This is the surest guarantee for Indian Muslims in their present peculiar circumstances. Allah has promised the protection of both the Qur'ān and its bearers. For the Qur'ān cannot flourish without Muslims.

Since Allah has given us this promise of protection, the happenings around us cannot change His guarantee. Whenever Allah wills something, He only says "Be" and it is. His command suffices for everything.

The above verse should be of much solace and comfort for us. Blessed are those who enjoy the divine guarantee. It is like Noah's Ark. Whoever boarded it was granted safe passage. The ark was the only refuge against the all-round devastation. In the face of our present chaotic conditions, arising from materialism, selfishness, the mad race for power and a lust for authority, the Qur'ān is our only refuge. Today the Prophet's legacy, like Noah's Ark, is our only ray of hope. Whoever turns to the Qur'ān is destined to survive. We should take shelter under the Qur'ān. For Allah has promised protection for such. Whoever abides by the Qur'ān is bound to flourish. The key to our survival, protection and excellence lies in adhering to the Qur'ān, its message and in acting on it. Let us dedicate ourselves to preaching and defending it. This is what Allah has asked us to do.

5. Regard for our righteous ancestors

وَٱلَّذِينَ جَآءُو مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا ٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَا وَلِإِخۡوَٰنِنَا ٱلَّذِينَ سَبَقُونَا بِٱلۡإِيمَٰنِ وَلَا تَجۡعَلۡ فِي قُلُوبِنَا غِلّٗا لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ رَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٌ ١٠

And it is also due to those who came after them [early Muslims], saying: Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who have preceded us in faith. And do not put in our hearts any rancour towards

those who have already believed. Lord! You are the Most Tender, Most Merciful.

(*al-Ḥashr* 59:10)

Muslims are asked in the above passage to heartily acknowledge the glorious contribution of their pious ancestors. They should place on record the latter's truthfulness, sincerity, obedience to their Lord, their fear of Allah, their service in the cause of faith and their defence of Islamic frontiers; the latter taking precedence. Muslims of a later date should not hold any rancour towards them. Nor should they feel any reservation in expressing their debt to them. Rather, they should praise them and supplicate for them. They should realise their compulsions and constraints and overlook their lapses. For no one is perfect.

One who takes the initiative is liable to err. Only those who go out face obstacles and get hurt. Let it also be realised that only the Prophet Muḥammad's directives are final and binding. Others' views may be accepted, altered or rejected.

For preaching the truth and for vindicating the greatness of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), especially his remarkable contribution, it is essential that we openly acclaim his Companions. It is incumbent on us to bring out their virtues, glory, loyalty, and mutual love and cooperation in the cause of truth. We should bring into relief this shining chapter of our history. As for their lapses, these pale into insignificance in comparison to their very many virtues and achievements. This is sheer common sense. The Qur'ān endorses this stance of placing on record the positive contributions of our predecessors.

We are urged to exercise caution and self-restraint in pronouncing any judgement on our pious ancestors. We should not act hastily in this regard. Nor should we be swayed by emotions on the subject. Unless we reach a definite conclusion in the light of careful study, we should not belittle any of our ancestors.

At times we tend to hold the view that those who did not strive to set up the Islamic state failed to achieve anything. Swayed by such a view, one dismisses such towering figures as Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Mujaddid Alf Thānī and Shāh Walīullāh. This also betrays a superficial reading of history. All of the above contributed, in their own ways, to the cause of the Islamic state. Included in this category are all *Ḥadīth* scholars, devout people and spiritual masters.

Going by the above fallacious logic, one may even find fault with Imām Abū Ḥanīfah. For, at most he instructed people in the commands about prayers and fasting while he was not practically involved in establishing the Islamic state. Had an Islamic state been in place, who would have taught us how to pray and fast? Without prayer and fasting this Islamic state would not have served any purpose.

Let us not think that all or some of our ancestors were far from perfect or that they had a poor understanding of Islam. They should not be held as guilty of having neglected the establishment of Islam in all walks of life. Rather, we should clearly bear in mind that all of them served the cause of Islam in their own varied ways. Some were engaged in delivering sermons, others in teaching *Ḥadīth*. Some took up the role of jurisprudent, others wrote books on various aspects of Islam. Each one of them thus imparted Islamic training. Each had his own specific assignment.

It should not be presumed that people have gained an understanding of Islam only in our times. Nor should it be held that Islam was not grasped in earlier times. This would represent a very serious allegation against Islam itself. For it calls into question the efficacy of the Qur'ān in prescribing a way of life. The Qur'ān was sent down in chaste Arabic. Hence it cannot be held that it remained incomprehensible.

If the Qur'ān was not grasped until now, how can it be safely assumed that its present interpretation is valid? On the contrary, the truth is that the fundamental articles of the Islamic faith have been consistently grasped and followed down the ages. One who thinks that these were not interpreted properly suffers from myopic vision. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah claims that not a single act of *Sunnah*

has been abandoned since the beginning of Islam and that Islam has been followed faithfully in its original form from the very outset. True believers have thus adhered to Islam all along.

Let us hold our ancestors in esteem for this is good for our own faith. We should also supplicate to Allah as the Qur'ān instructs: *Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who have preceded us in faith. And do not put in our hearts any rancour towards those who have already believed. Lord! You are the Most Tender, Most Merciful.* (*al-Ḥashr* 59:10)

6. The Qur'ānic model of Life

وَٱلْعَصْرِ ﴿١﴾ إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ لَفِى خُسْرٍ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا۟ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا۟ بِٱلصَّبْرِ ﴿٣﴾

By the time! Man is certainly in loss. But not those who believe and do good deeds, and enjoin truth upon one another.
(*al-ʿAṣr* 103:1-3)

The above represents one of the shortest yet most comprehensive *sūrahs*. Imām Shāfiʿī, who ranks among the four most distinguished Islamic scholars of all times, maintains that the Qur'ān would have sufficed for the guidance of mankind if it contained only this *sūrah*. For it lays down an exhaustive code of life, not only for Muslims, but for all human beings. It represents the divine model of life.

According to the reports of the early days of Islam, whenever the Companions met and stayed together for some time, they would recite this *sūrah* before parting their ways. They regarded such a get together where this *sūrah* was recited as being full of blessing. For they believed that they would not be taken to task for so joining together when their meeting concluded with a note calling everyone to the way of Allah.

In the opening verse, time is invoked. For what follows is closely related to time. Hence time is taken as an apt witness. The same holds true for history. This short *sūrah* relates the account of man – past present and future. Only time accompanies man in all periods. All else is mortal. Even the most pious human being is mortal in that, according to the Qur'ān, he has to taste death. Even the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), the beloved of Allah and His Final Messenger, was clearly told that he was a mortal human being, destined to die. Muslims were told not to abandon faith in the event of the Prophet's death or assassination. No one is to survive in this world forever. Yet time is the only witness to the past, present and future. Man's success and failure down the millennia is recorded in time. So is the account of mighty conquerors and emperors. Even the most distinguished people of the day, famous for their achievements, and the wretched masses, and people of all classes have been witnessed by time. The *sūrah* therefore opens, citing time as the witness to man's story.

The next verse contains a shocking message for man, which should alarm him instantly. It should immediately attract man's full attention. For what is said is directly relevant to the human condition. All the hurley-burley of life is dependent upon man's desire to reap some benefit. This strong urge has driven man into diverse fields, as a result of which culture, knowledge, industry, philosophy, technology and man's potentiality have registered tremendous advances. Man has been fired up all along by this inner desire to gain some advantage. Without this drive, man would not have an inclination for anything and it would put an end to all activity. All the glitter of life would fade away. Man wants some benefit and for this he devotes himself heart and soul. In the absence of this powerful motive, there would not be any conquest or activity in any field.

The Qur'ān brings home profound truths which should awaken man. It is by way of a wake-up call, to which everyone should listen, abandoning what is at hand. That man is in loss should serve as a jolt to the man who may be in slumber. The Qur'ānic statement is

by way of a generalisation, applicable to all human beings of every time and place, and of every social and economic class. It is a striking statement.

Nonetheless, it is qualified with the observation that such men are safe against loss who believe and who do good. It thus covers both beliefs and deeds. Reference is made to man's faith and to his character, morals and actions. All other human beings are in loss.

To use an analogy, man is like a trader in ice. Ice melts soon enough. His life is like ice, perishable and ephemeral. Some may mistakenly think that they will live for ever. However, the ground reality is that man is mortal. If one does not trade properly, or so to say, sell ice on time, it will go to waste. If one is a stockist of ice and wastes his time on social talk or leisure activities, his stock will yield him nothing. For the ice will melt into water in no time. This constitutes his loss. The same analogy applies to man's life. If he does not engage in good deeds, time will pass and his life will come to an end, leaving him an utter loser with nothing to his credit. One should make the most of the time granted to one. Otherwise one will end up as a loser.

The Qur'ān asserts that man is in loss. This is true of the majority of mankind. They do not realise the loss incurred by them. Everything is in accordance with the laws of nature. Life passes as time moves on. With every breath man's life span decreases. If man does not take steps to make his life meaningful and rewarding, he will not get another opportunity. To put it otherwise, if one does not invest wisely, one will cut a sorry figure running in deficit.

That man is in loss is illustrated by man's conduct. If he wastes his youth, his physical strength and his potential, he cannot achieve anything. Man is mortal. So is life ephemeral. It is therefore in man's interest to avail himself of the opportunity granted to him. Otherwise he will always lament his loss. As man is mortal, he should realise the potentials granted to him by his Lord. Unless one strikes a bargain, one cannot have real gain. If one sells diamonds to the ignorant masses, they will not be interested in one's merchandise.

Man is accordingly instructed in professing belief and doing good. Life is likened to trade in which man is the seller. At another place, the Qur'ān declares that Allah has purchased the believers' souls and belongings in return for Paradise. The terms of reference are loud and clear. Man is clearly told what he is to sell and for what price. His failure to do so will result in his own loss.

Man is exhorted to profess faith and perform good deeds. This is what renders meaning and value to human life. Devoid of these, man's life is worthless. Millions of men have wasted their lives, unable to strike any bargain. Among them were kings, rulers, legislators, intellectuals, writers, poets, inventors and conquerors. They did not realise the true meaning of life. They were not guided by their Creator's directives.

Sound belief and good deeds invest man's life with worth and dignity. This is Allah's will. As man's Creator He has instructed man in the true worth of human life. Out of His immense kindness He has spelled out what kind of life is valuable in His sight. He has promised His reward for leading life in a particular manner. Those practising sound belief and performing good deeds are promised His reward. He does not place any value on man's mansions, luxury cars and fiefdoms. In His sight these are all worthless. He places a premium only on faith and good deeds. Allah has been kind enough to bless us with life. More importantly, He has fixed the value of life. This criterion is eternal, valid for all time and place. Many things in the universe go to waste, for no one knows their true worth. Allah has kindly informed us of the immense value of our life.

If man is characterised by faith and good deeds, he will be saved from loss. This applies to both individuals and the community as a whole. Individuals may exercise caution. However, the same message is directed at the whole of society as well. For reforming and restructuring a sound society along Islamic lines the Qur'ān provides two important guidelines.

Apart from professing faith and practising good deeds a believer should enjoin truth upon those around him. His failure in this regard

will result in damage to society. Even that individual suffers, for it is his community that incurs loss. In such communities in which truth and perseverance are not enjoined, there is corruption at the collective level. Both individuals and society as a whole suffer. The presence of pious individuals within a community is not sufficient. It is important that they exhort their family members and their children, in particular, to offer prayers, shun evil, eschew injustice and refrain from corruption. Their neglect of this duty culminates in the weakening and disintegration of the whole of society.

By professing and practising faith and good deeds an individual may avoid loss. However, being part of a degenerate society he cannot be safe. The Qur'ān therefore asks individuals to promote virtue. Their faith should inspire others. Like beacon lights they should draw others around them and radiate the glow of faith and good deeds. If other members of society do not respond to their call, even these believers will find it hard to adhere to faith. They cannot profess faith consistently, for in a corrupt ambience even the pious feel suffocated. They cannot pursue uninterruptedly the straight way. It is akin to a room without a supply of fresh air, which suffocates its inmates.

Pious individuals cannot fight against a sinful society. They are too helpless to restrain those indulging in evil. Rather, corrupt society seeks to expel pious souls. An instance in point is afforded by the Prophet Lot's community. They had fallen to abysmal depths of degeneration. The Prophet Lot (peace and blessings be upon him) and his family members were powerless to set them on the right track. Though these pious people were without any resources, the corrupt society of the day could not put up with their presence. They sought to drive away the prophet and his family members. It is fairly evident that an immoral society cannot reconcile itself with the presence of noble souls. I often meet friends who take pride in telling me that they do not accept bribery, yet for this crime they are victimised in their offices. So much so that their colleagues find it hard to work with these honest people. Rather, they grow restless upon observing them. In other words, a degenerate society cannot

tolerate pious individuals. The latter are tempted and threatened if they do not join hands with those who are corrupt. These noble souls insist on following the straight way, pointing to the divine directives about honesty and morality. However, those who are sinful cannot put up with them, for they do not want their consciences pricked. For this reason they seek to get rid of pious souls.

Accordingly, the Qur'ān cautions that faith and good deeds on the part of an individual do not suffice. They should preach truth vigorously. Without this call to truth, society is bound to go astray, and in which case these pious individuals are unable to do any good. It is therefore, imperative that they enjoin truth and perseverance upon others. In their gatherings they should promote virtue, draw others to the way of Allah, and ask them to observe the lawful and the unlawful. The Qur'ān miraculously alerts us to the dangers involved in this call. For the pious who enjoin truth and virtue are usually opposed. They should therefore be ready to make sacrifices and face losses. This naturally calls for patience. The enjoining of perseverance is, therefore, stressed in the *sūrah*. It is after all not an easy path and the pious who pursue this straight way do encounter opponents as also run the risk of both loss and damage. In such instances they should exercise self-restraint. This is the Islamic code of life, of which all parts are interrelated. These different parts reinforce the whole. Faith is the first and foremost in this scheme of things.

The crucial factor is the relationship between man and his Creator. Man should realise in the depths of his heart that Allah is the Creator of the universe and its Regulator. All creation and commands rest solely with Him. He has brought the universe into being and runs it. He has not retreated after creating it. Adherents of some religions mistakenly think that there is a Creator, marked with divinity yet they refuse to see His role in the working of the universe. They do not think that His commands reign supreme. There are many Muslims even who do not maintain any link with Allah. At most, they take it as a historical truth that at some point in time Allah created the universe. Now, they believe they are free to act as they like. They

even ascribe different domains to specific deities who may reward or punish.

To begin with, we should profess sound beliefs. All the messengers and scriptures focused on imparting articles of sound faith. Faith should be present with its true spirit. One should first renew one's faith. No allowance can be made in matters of faith. Some people may well ask as to why they are taken as being in error when their conduct is right. So doing, they disregard faith altogether.

The first and foremost point is that man should acknowledge his humanness. He should take Allah as the Creator, Ruler and Master of the universe. Then he should engage in good deeds, as specified by the *Sharīʿah*. On his own man cannot decide which act is good and which is not. Whatever is pronounced as good and bad in the *Sharīʿah* should be followed as such, without reservation.

7. Islam as a divine bounty

وَٱعْتَصِمُوا۟ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا۟ ۚ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ
كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِۦٓ إِخْوَٰنًا وَكُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا
حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

And hold fast, all of you to the rope of Allah, and do not separate. And remember Allah's favour to you in that you were enemies, and He joined your hearts together, so you became brethren by His favour. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire and He rescued you from it. Thus Allah expounds to you His revelations that perhaps you may remain guided.

(*Āl ʿImrān* 3:103)

We should always remember in our minds the message the above verse imparts. For it speaks of the great divine bounty with which Allah has blessed Muslims.

Mankind was steeped in ignorance and error. We were ignorant of such life-enriching concepts as monotheism, messengership and the Hereafter. Nor had we any idea of moral values and religious teachings. We were engrossed in superstition. We were in the clutches of tyrants. Humanity was at its nadir. Mighty rulers and clergy had claimed divinity for themselves. The poor masses were forced to pay tribute to them, as is mentioned in the Qur'ān: *They had taken their priests and their monks for their lords, besides Allah.* (*al-Tawbah* 9:31)

As Islam appeared on the scene, it illuminated the whole world. Islam was meant for everyone. So to speak, it was like long-awaited rainfall that makes no distinction among its beneficiaries. Islam revived life and moral values everywhere. No blessing is greater than that of Islam. It is even more valuable than life itself. Without the life-giving message of Islam premised on absolute monotheism, life would have been utterly miserable. Man would have landed himself in Hellfire had he not been blessed with Islam. We must thank Allah profusely for having conferred this great blessing upon us. We are indebted to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), his mission, his call and his striving, which rescued us all.

Allah reminds us in the above passage of our condition. We were one another's enemies, like bloodthirsty beasts. At that point Allah infused into our hearts mutual love and made us, by His grace, brethren unto faith. As a result, all Muslims are equal, be they the rich or poor, of the élite or commoners. In the mosque one observes this perfect equality and brotherhood.

History contains only a partial record of the discords which vitiated our lives before the emergence of Islam. Men fought against one another on issues of race, colour, social class, language, culture and economic distinction. Bloodshed was rife. Islam, however, promoted mutual love and peace.

The Qur'ān goes a step further in projecting mankind as on the brink of Hellfire in the pre-Islamic period. Allah, however, rescued mankind through Islam. Had Allah not sent down Islam and His Messenger, nothing could have stopped us from hurling headlong into Hellfire.

Even today leading philosophers, intellectuals, scholars and rulers are unable to appreciate Islam which is based wholly on common sense. However, Allah has conferred Islam on us. No other ideology, philosophy, movement or "ism" should deviate us from Islam. It is recorded in *Ḥadīth* compiled by Imām Bukhārī that one who combines in himself the following three aspects has perfected his faith – holding Allah and His Messenger as the dearest and having revulsion against disbelief. Such a believer even dreads the very thought of reverting to disbelief. This as much as he abhors the idea of being consigned to the Fire. Even if he sees himself in a dream indulging in disbelief or any anti-Islamic act or in a conspiracy against Allah and His Messenger, he cries out in utter pain and anguish, causing his other family members to wake up. This he takes as the worst possible nightmare, for disbelief is totally unacceptable to him.

Let us appreciate the immense bounty Allah has conferred upon us. Through Him we are fortunate enough to learn the credal statement of Islam and to grasp the truth of monotheism. This is the greatest blessing, in comparison to which all worldly glory is worthless. For the sake of our faith in Islam we should sacrifice the most sprawling empire on earth. If a Muslim is offered a mighty empire in exchange for abandoning his faith, the very thought should unsettle him. For he can never reconcile losing his faith at any price. To bargain with faith is nothing less than revulsion.

Islam is the only way out. All other paths represent blind alleys. Allah has been merciful to us in having guided us to His way through His Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The Qur'ān proclaims that Islam is the faith in Allah's sight for mankind.

As long as Muslims realise this truth and they adhere to it, they cannot go astray. It will make them immune against all hardship and misery.

8. The Collective mindset and the spirit of sacrifice

وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ ... ﴿١٩٥﴾

Do not throw yourselves into destruction.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:195)

We Muslims should develop a collective mindset. We should never think of our personal interests at the expense of our faith and community. An approach based on selfishness is highly destructive. In the verse above the Qur'ān warns us against this. An instance in point is the partial reading of the verse which tells us not to approach prayer when we are drunk. Were one to misread this only partially, one might maintain that the Qur'ān asks us not to offer prayer.

Some misinterpret the Qur'ānic directive: "*Do not throw yourselves into destruction*" in the sense of avoiding any danger or loss in the cause of faith. If they are asked to go out to preach their faith, while risking their business and trade, they cite this verse in order to evade their duty. This is a total misreading of the verse, for rather, its stance runs counter to such claims.

Once Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī came across some discussion along the above lines. He clarified that the verse under discussion was sent down regarding the *Anṣār*. He then explained its circumstantial setting. When Islam reached Madīnah the Muslims were weak. The believing Madīnans, however, reinforced Islam with their lives and belongings, disregarding altogether their personal loss and suffering. They pledged their lives to the cause of Islam. They were ever ready to go out for its cause whether it be in a battle context or visiting places outside Madīnah to preach Islam. Likewise, they generously spent all that they possessed in the cause of Islam. They turned blind to all else besides Islam. For the sake of Islam they neglected their agricultural fields, orchards and shops. After a few years however Islam had gained much strength; it could no longer be considered as weak. Yet in the

meantime the *Anṣār* were aware that their businesses, trades, fields, shops and property had all suffered losses. They therefore sought leave for a short period of time, thinking that they were entitled to this. It is common knowledge that soldiers, teachers and students get leave on a regular basis. While the *Anṣār* so thought of taking such leave, the verse under study was sent down, asking them not to incur self-destruction. They were thus told to devote themselves, as in the past, to the cause of faith. No leave was granted them. Rather, they were warned that such leave would lead them to self-destruction. They were thus asked to spend in Allah's way and not to indulge in self-destruction. For Allah loves those who do good. This places the verse in its proper historical context.

At a point in time it was very difficult for Indians to perform *Ḥajj*. This was further compounded by Bedouin Arabs who were given to robbing pilgrims. In view of this menace some *'Ulamā'* decreed that Indian Muslims need not go on pilgrimage, citing the above verse in support of their ruling. May Allah reward and confer exalted rank upon Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and his disciples who rose against this ruling. They issued an altogether different decree. Some of Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's disciples and family members themselves performed *Ḥajj* so setting the general anxiety at rest. This was necessary in order to persuade Indian Muslims as to their safety, otherwise they would have mistakenly thought they need not perform pilgrimage. This, in turn, would gradually have led to the abandoning of other religious duties such as *zakāh*, fasting and prayer. For one may even cite the above verse saying that in extremely cold weather one cannot perform *wuḍū'*. Nor is one able to offer prayers in summer when the nights are short. If one misinterprets this verse in the sense of sustaining any discomfort, this puts an end to the performance of all religious duties, for there is often some slight inconvenience in discharging these. Muslims then should be characterised by a collective spirit, ensuring the welfare of the whole *Ummah*. If everyone behaves selfishly, the cause of faith cannot be well served.

It is our collective duty to take care of the religious needs of our locality and town. We should maintain our mosques and *Madrasahs* and impart religious education and training to the young. We should be equally concerned about the conduct of our fellow Muslims. Allah's mercy is after all withheld on account of Muslims' misdeeds and it is they who fail to reap any benefit because of their own weaknesses. It is common knowledge that today Muslims are guilty of many unjust acts. If we fail to realise our role as a faith community, our survival in a non-Muslim majority country such as India will become very difficult.

Without collective thinking we cannot achieve much. For then everyone would be engrossed in meeting their own personal needs, in bringing up their children only with a view to getting a good job for them, and this would spell disaster for the community as a whole. This is a pernicious mentality which should be checked. For it kills community spirit. If such a mentality flourishes, no effort for social reform or community welfare can be successful. It is regrettable that such a mentality is on the rise in our country. We have become a highly selfish people, concerned only with our own petty interests, our own prosperity, our own success in trade and industry and with our own material well-being. Prompted by such individual interests we act and do nothing beyond this.

This mindset must change. We should feel a genuine concern for the issues confronting our faith and community. This is an important need. Without this realisation no organisation, no preacher or writer can lead us to the path of success and glory. I pray to Allah that Muslims grasp this truth at the very earliest.

[VIII]
Obligations

1. The Duty of the Muslim Community

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ إِلَّا تَفْعَلُوهُ تَكُن فِتْنَةٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَفَسَادٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

And the unbelievers, they shall be heirs to one another. If you do not do this, persecution and corruption will be in the land.
(*al-Anfāl* 8:73)

As a student of the Qur'ān I am always struck by its marvels. Generally speaking, if one reads a book on a regular basis, one gets used to its features. One is no longer impressed with its beauty. Reading the Qur'ān has, however, been a totally different experience for me.

Quantity and quality are familiar concepts for us. Allah, however, prefers quality to quantity. This truth comes out in light of the verse quoted above. This verse was addressed to a small number of early Muslims, consisting of the Makkan migrants and their Madīnan helpers. At most, their total number barely constituted one thousand, five hundred. Allah exhorts them in the above verse to forge ties of

brotherhood. The Makkan migrants were bonded with their Madīnan helpers, and here they are asked to develop and maintain a true spirit of mutual help and support. They are directed to merge into a single community, united in their belief in Allah. Furthermore, they should have love and sympathy for humanity at large. At the same time, they should be firm in their faith.

These early Muslims are told that if they betray any lapse on this count and fail to consolidate themselves into a single, indivisible unit, the earth will be filled with corruption and injustice. For ages mankind had been riven with division and subdivision. As bearers of a noble message Muslims were expected to display exemplary fraternity. Their failure on this count would have been disastrous for the whole of mankind.

It is worth considering that the above directive was given to a small group of people confined to a little-known town, which later came to be known as Madīnah. They were few in number. They possessed meagre resources. They did not represent a force by any standard. They were unknown on the world stage. Their social and economic life lacked any remarkable feature. According to a report recorded by Bukhārī, the census put their total number at only one thousand, five hundred individuals.

Yet they were issued with the above directive. This was not addressed to the Romans who ruled over half of the world, and who represented a superpower of the day. Roman culture flourished far and wide, as they were then the greatest military and political force. Nor was this directive given to the Persians, who reigned supreme in the other half of the world. By all appearances, the Romans and Persians were at the helm of world affairs. Their cultures were imitated by others, plus they enjoyed a monopoly over all material resources. In sum, they were the lords and masters of the world. Yet they were not addressed by this simple message.

On the contrary, those few early Muslims were the ones who were alerted to their role in the world. They were warned of great corruption breaking out in the land. As bearers of Islam, they were

instructed in their duty. They were to display equality and fraternity and if they did not do so, mischief would spread all around them. They were imparted thus with the values of sincerity, self-sacrifice and self surrender. Let as remind ourselves once again that these Muslims then numbered only a few hundred, yet they shouldered the gigantic task of leading the whole of humanity.

Muslims matter because of their quality and inner strength, not in terms of their numbers. Blessed with true faith, excellent morals and manners, sound consciences and a devotion to Allah permeating their minds and hearts they were to influence the whole of humanity. Muslims then are valuable because of hallmarks. Allah does not attach importance to large numbers. Nor is worldly rule and authority assigned any significance.

My evaluation of Muslims is by the same standard, as set by Allah, that they should be of excellent quality, studded with the features sought by the Almighty.

2. The Duty of Muslim Leaders

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱصْبِرُواْ وَصَابِرُواْ وَرَابِطُواْ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

O Believers! Persevere and excel in perseverance and be consistent and fear Allah so that you may thrive.

(*Āl ʿImrān* 3:200)

The Qur'ānic directive above is that Muslims should both persevere and enjoin this upon others. Let us now reflect on this directive a little. For a community, especially in its quest for success and glory, patience as an individual quality does not suffice. This should instead be marked by collective perseverance, consistency and resolve. This is essential for the community's rise and growth. Each member of

the community should be a source of strength and comfort for other members. Each one should be patient and consistent and preach the same to others. His life should be adorned with a firm and true faith, constancy, high ideals and noble objectives. His virtuous life should be as a role model for others. He should inspire confidence in others and boost their morale. No one should be allowed to air feelings of despondency. Rather, patience, courage and consistency should be affirmed by everyone, even in the face of utter harassment and persecution.

Muslims are also directed to be consistent in their faith. Know that frontiers consist of two types – the ideological and the physical. Both must be guarded with equal care and caution. Self-respecting nations put everything at stake to defend their frontiers. They lay down their lives in large numbers for this cause. Nonetheless, military defeat is not always final defeat. A set-back does not annihilate a people altogether. For defeat is, at times, followed by victory. For logistical reasons a people may move away from their borders and recover the same at a later stage. During the days of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Companions and throughout Islamic history such rises and falls in military terms have been common. Those addicted only to winning cannot hold their ground for long. A community should experience both defeat and victory for self-development. Hence why Allah let His beloved Messenger and his Companions enjoy both victory and defeat in the early history of Islam.

The ideological frontier or basis conversely is an altogether different story. A defeat on this score often inflicts a severe blow to a whole community, putting it back for thousands of years. It may even completely seal the fate of that community. Today, Muslims in India are pitted in such a battle. Their identity and ideology are in peril. The issues haunting them are their preservation as a distinct faith community, their Islamic way of life, their Muslim personal law, their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, the future of their young generations and the defence of their faith. Only Muslim

leaders can devise solutions to these problems, for they are gifted with the requisite knowledge, expertise, sensitivity, far-sightedness and pragmatism. They have the necessary resources to tackle these problems. Their conscientiousness, timely action and concern for the community can help Muslims overcome the impending dangers. On the other hand, their inaction, lethargy and apathy will deliver a fatal blow to the Muslim community, afflicting it for a long time to come. If they do not sacrifice their petty self-interests for the sake of the community, everyone is bound to suffer such a long loss, for the impending dangers will envelop the entire community.

3. The twin obligations of Muslims

وَكَأَيِّن مِّنْ ءَايَةٍ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth they pass by, while they are averse to these.

(*Yūsuf* 12:105)

Through the Qur'ān Muslims are instructed to draw lessons from all that is around them. They should infer sound conclusions from events. Allah has devised the law of cause and effect. Each object in the universe has certain characteristics, for example, herbs, plants and even grass. This is equally true of morals and manners and our way of life. For herbs, plants and other objects in the universe have been created for man. He draws upon these for sustenance, medication and comfort. How much more important then is man's conduct? Essentially, man should analyse events with a view to learning lessons for the future. That the Qur'ān condemns those who fail to draw any such lesson is evident from the verse quoted above. Those are reproached who pass by divine signs and do not derive any benefit from the same. A more trenchant rebuke features in the following verse: *Say: "Behold what is*

in the heavens and the earth, and signs and warnings, the unbelievers do not avail themselves of these." (*Yūnus* 10:101)

Of similar import is the following verse: *Soon We shall show them Our signs in the universe and in their own selves until it becomes manifest to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice in this regard to your Lord that He is a witness over everything?* (*Fuṣṣilat* 41:53)

The first duty of Muslims, no matter which country they live in, is to introduce true faith to their countrymen. For Allah has blessed Muslims with the great bounty of Islam. This should be their primary concern. The messengers of Allah always felt this concern. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) felt so strongly on this issue that Allah consoled him, telling him not to grieve so much over the unbelievers as this would kill him (verse 3 of *al-Shuʿarā'*). Next to the messengers, *'Ulamā'* and pious members of the Muslim community should promote Islam in their country of residence. They should make others share the blessing which has been bestowed upon them. They should spread the light of Islam as much as possible. This is a duty assigned to Muslims by the Qur'ān.

Their other duty is to introduce themselves as adherents of a particular faith. This is the dictate of both common sense and Islam. They should let others realise their beliefs, their way of life and their *Sharīʿah*. Their good conduct should draw others closer to Islam. They should be of such excellent character so as to arouse curiosity in others about their faith. For their morals should be high. They should not hurt anyone. Rather, they should be sincere with everyone. They should not betray any attachment to material things. On the contrary, their lives should display such values and ideals which should make them stand apart. They should be perceived as men of constant principles, who cannot reconcile themselves to falsehood, and who cannot indulge in any injustice. Their actions should be governed by their constant concern for the Hereafter. Such conduct by Muslims is bound to strike a chord in the hearts of non-Muslims. They are then most likely to rethink their own faith and beliefs, comparing these with Islam.

4. The concept of accountability

فَلَوْلَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْقُرُونِ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ أُوْلُوا۟ بَقِيَّةٍ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْفَسَادِ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّنْ أَنجَيْنَا مِنْهُمْ ... ﴿١١٦﴾

Why were there not among the generations before you owners of wisdom restraining others from corruption on the earth, except a few of those whom We delivered from among them?
(*Hūd* 11:116)

This verse holds a mirror to the conduct of earlier communities. It forcefully and effectively remarks on their failings. So doing, the Qur'ān reminds Muslims of their role as the leaders of mankind, their duty to reform and to enjoin good and forbid evil. Muslims will be held accountable on these counts. The question is posed as to why the conscience keepers of earlier communities did not act. Why did they not resist corruption and injustice? Why did they not rise up against mischief? Those concerned with the well-being of humanity should have stood up. They should have been able to diagnose the malaise afflicting their society. The very issue of preserving their heritage should have prompted them to do something at least. They should have devised a suitable strategy to turn society around, thereby motivating others to follow suit. This then is the message conveyed by this verse. Those who can study the Qur'ān in its original Arabic may appreciate the above point better.

The Qur'ān addresses those whose conscience is not wholly dead. They can perceive the truth. The teachings of the messengers had left some imprint upon them. Among them those who had studied history, particularly the phenomenon of the rise and fall of communities, knew well, that human actions have a definite bearing. They realised that moral degeneration culminates in disaster. They further noted well that it deluges the whole community, making no distinction between rich and poor, the sinner and the pious. Like a flood it

wreaks havoc upon everyone. To put it otherwise, moral decay is like a fire raging through a community; it does not discriminate. People are quickly corrupted by rampant immorality, leaving only a select few with the fervour generated by faith to fight against it.

Whenever I recite this verse, I am deeply moved by its thrust. The Qur'ān does not warn mankind in this instance against polytheism. The focus of attention instead is on moral corruption. Only a select band of true believers stand up against it.

On reading accounts of those noble souls who promoted faith and reform, one learns that the majority never took up such missions. Instead, as corruption spread, only the tiny minority of pious souls stood out against it. At a later stage they were joined by others and then momentum was gained. Gradually they became a force to be reckoned with, carving out a niche for themselves. The messengers of Allah represent the most glorious examples on this count. As for other noble souls, they follow in their footsteps.

Throughout history these have been they who resisted corruption in all its forms, be it mammon-worship or base desire. They remain ever ready to expose falsehood.

5. Islam *vis-à-vis* power

ٱلَّذِينَ إِن مَّكَّنَّٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَمَرُوا۟ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا۟ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلْأُمُورِ ﴿٤١﴾

Those who, if We establish them in the land, will establish the prayer and pay zakāh and enjoin good and forbid evil. And unto Allah is the end of all affairs.

(*al-Ḥajj* 22:41)

This verse stands out for its broad range of concepts and meanings. History testifies to the truth encapsulated therein.

Allah declares that if He grants power to the believers, they will not abuse it to lead a life of luxury. Nor will they indulge in material pursuits, nor have palaces, nor accumulate treasure. They will not focus only on refining their culture and beautifying their towns. Fast-moving vehicles and quality food will not be their main concerns. Rather, their careers will be characterised by conquest, resolve and noble ideals.

On being blessed with power and authority, they will turn to prayer. Not only will they offer this, rather they will establish it, making it an essential part of their lives. They will create an ambience conducive to its performance. Moreover, they will instil its importance into the minds of others. Furthermore, they will participate in the erection of mosques. In sum, then, the verse depicts wide-ranging concepts for believers to execute.

Likewise, they will cheerfully pay *zakāh*. They will popularise both the concept and practice of *zakāh*. More importantly, they will enjoin good and forbid evil. Let it be realised that the Qur'ān employs the imperative form for assigning this duty. Muslims are not requested to do this. Rather, they are commanded to accomplish this task. It goes without saying that Arabic is a rich language, employing different forms for commands and requests. The Qur'ān has thus carefully chosen the imperative form on this count.

Muslims are obliged to enjoin good and forbid evil. To do this they need power and authority. Those entrusted with this task should enjoy respect and high position in society. For people should realise that their failure to abide by these directives might entail punishment. In brief, the group enjoining good and forbidding evil should be invested with political power and authority.

They should be in a position to pronounce what is right and wrong. They should ask people to do certain things. At the same time, they should be powerful enough to restrain people from doing that which is bad. They should have the confidence and the trust to enforce their rulings.

In other words, power is essential for Islam. Islam does not always request its followers to do something and refrain from others. Moral guidelines are necessary as well. However, by the Qur'ānic standard, good should be enforced and evil should be extirpated by force. Muslims should have such power and authority to accomplish this. This is essential for reforming mankind. The above Qur'ānic commands rest on this same premise.

It is equally important that only such should be in power who are pious and fear Allah and the Hereafter. Their main concern should be their final end in the Hereafter.

Let us clarify that offering prayer, paying *zakāh* and enjoining good and forbidding evil are the objectives, not the means for setting up an Islamic state. The state may promote and strengthen these by creating a conducive atmosphere for the performance of these religious duties.

6. Shunning un-Islamic practices

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَقُولُوا۟ رَٰعِنَا وَقُولُوا۟ ٱنظُرْنَا وَٱسْمَعُوا۟ ۗ وَلِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٤﴾

O Believers! Do not say: "Rā'inā" but say "Unẓurnā" and listen. There is grievous punishment for the unbelievers.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:104)

It is in order to recall the setting in which this verse was revealed and its import. So let us now identify its underlying message.

Rā'inā literally means "to pay attention". *Unẓurnā* is another standard expression, meaning: "wait for us, ensuring whether we have grasped the point well or not". Since both are near synonyms in standard Arabic, it raises the question as to why Muslims are asked not to use the former expression. This command features in the Qur'ān,

an eternal Book which is to be recited until the Last Day. It is common knowledge that the Qur'ān is recited in many non-Arabic speaking countries. Yet an Arabic expression is accorded such importance. It is worth asking why this point forms part of a Book which is studied the world over and translated into all major world languages. Let us determine then why the use of the former expression is forbidden and why its alternative is prescribed.

Generally speaking, those individuals or groups who suspect injustice to be perpetrated against them suffer from an inferiority complex. To vent their anger and frustration they resort to abusive language. Words which carry a double meaning are fairly common in every language. The same word may be twisted with intonation to heap insult. It was the practice of Madīnan Jews that when they called on the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), they twisted the innocuous word *rā'ínā* as *rā'īnā*. The latter means: "O our shepherd". The Jews suffered from the delusion that all human beings other than the progeny of the Prophet Jacob (Israel) are inferior. They openly referred to non-Israelites as Gentiles. Furthermore, they believed that it was perfectly legitimate to cheat, torment and oppress any Gentile. For they maintained that they would not be held accountable by God for their misconduct towards Gentiles. The Prophet Muḥammad's Companions being noble and decent people did not detect the abuse heaped upon them by these Jews. However, since Allah is All-Aware and All-Knowing and Who knows well all that is said even what is implicitly intended, He directed the Companions to use the alternative expression, *unẓurnā*, which could not be twisted.

It is worth noting that Allah was very particular even about the use of a single expression employed in ages past. Furthermore, He could condone Muslims imitating un-Islamic practices and rituals. He was and is averse to any such practice by Muslims. The non-Muslims of India took to many innovations in their religion, inventing festivals and festivities for social reasons. So doing they neglected their link with their Lord. For their outward profession of faith, however, they

took to participating in religious processions and introducing a host of religious festivals such as *Ram Lila*, *Dassehra*, *Holi*, *Diwali*, *Durga* and *Ganpati* celebrations in Bengal and Deccan respectively.

In contrast, Islam represents an altogether different spirit. Take the following events as illustrative. Once a rabbi visited ʿUmar, saying to him: "O Commander of the believers! You regularly recite a verse (verse 3 of *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*). Had it been sent down to the Jews, they would have held celebrations to mark its revelation." When ʿUmar asked him to specify the verse, he recited the following: "Today I have perfected for you your faith and completed My favour upon you ...", (verse 3 of *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*). This rabbi recognised that no such final proclamation exists in his scripture. Islam is the only faith, regarding which such a proclamation of finality exists. The Jews naturally felt this gap. As a result, there regularly appeared false claimants to messengership in these religious communities. Jewish and Christian scholars even lament this deplorable state of affairs in their own writings. For it caused divisions and sub-division among them. The rabbi therefore felicitated ʿUmar that Muslims were blessed with such a proclamation. He, however, expressed his surprise that Muslims do not observe this as an occasion for celebration.

ʿUmar's reply to his question is reflective of his insight into faith and of the special training which he had received from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). He replied thus: "We know well when and where this verse was sent down. It was revealed on 9 Dhū'l-Ḥijjah at ʿArafāt." ʿUmar said only this much. It clearly meant that the occasion was recognised as a historic day by Muslims, for on this day Muslims from all parts of the world assemble at ʿArafāt to worship Allah. Muslims, nonetheless, do not regard this day as a festival. For the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) ordained only two *ʿĪds* for them – *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr* and *ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā*. Muslims have only these two festivals in contrast to the many celebrated by non-Muslims. Let it also be known that non-Muslims celebrate their festivals only for entertainment, the fun and joys of the flesh. They hardly turn to God. At times, they indulge in immoral acts during

their festivals. In comparison, on their festival days of the two *ʿĪds* Muslims offer an additional prayer in the early morning. On other days of the year they do not have any obligatory prayer in the early morning. *ʿĪd* Prayer is offered with additional invocations to Allah. An additional sermon is also delivered. This is thus the outstanding feature of Islamic festivals.

ʿUlamā' must ensure that Muslims do not commit any un-Islamic act. Muslims should not imitate non-Muslims in performing and participating in religious processions. This is worse than what is reproached in the above verse. Imitating non-Muslims in religious matters is a very serious sin, afflicting the beliefs, culture and society of Muslims.

ʿUlamā' must plainly say that an innovation or an un-Islamic practice has nothing to do with Islam. For it runs counter to the spirit and teachings of Islam. What is presently performed at shrines betrays the evil influence of non-Muslims. The entire history of such un-Islamic practices is on record. One can study the motives behind their introduction. Worship is the essence of faith. So is the turning to Allah at the core of faith. Monotheism is the main doctrine of Islam. Faith is also characterised by simplicity. Only such deeds are acceptable which benefit others and the person doing it. On *ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā* Muslims are obliged both to pray and to sacrifice an animal, for there are millions who cannot afford to have meat. On *ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā* they thus have the opportunity to have it to their fill. This also re-enacts the *Sunnah* of the Prophets Abraham, Ishmael and Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them).

ʿUlamā' must be vigilant about arresting the incursion of any un-Islamic practice. They should nip it in the bud immediately. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) advised: "Follow my *Sunnah* and the rulings of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Adhere to it and do not deviate from it." The main role of *madrasahs* is that these are the custodians of faith. If these fail to perform this role, they will lose their distinctive aspect. They are not therefore supposed to endorse such practices which are not sanctioned by the *Sharīʿah*.

'Ulamā' should display the utmost sensitivity to faith, monotheism and the *Sunnah*. *Madrasahs* were established out of the same spirit. Accordingly, these should maintain their true identity.

7. The duties of *'Ulamā'*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُونُوا۟ قَوَّٰمِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَآءَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ ... ﴿٨﴾

O believers! Maintain your covenant with Allah and be witnesses in equity.

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:8)

The whole Muslim community is to stand up for truth. Allah charges Muslims with this duty to uphold truth everywhere. They should perform this obligation wherever they are settled. Although the verse is directed at the entire Muslim community, the address is also specific to the *'Ulamā'*. They should be the champions of truth and justice. While Muslims should profess these ideals all over the world, *'Ulamā'* should ensure that the Muslim community adheres to these ideals. They should keep watch that the community does not deviate from its goals. Thus they should perform the role of witness.

Man is apt to infer profound conclusions from ordinary happenings. Shaykh Sa'dī, the great Persian poet, is acclaimed for this trait. The same is true of Rūmī who employs ordinary parables to convey lasting truths. Both are adept at drawing attention to the ultimate reality. Let me recount my recent personal experience. I undertook a long journey from Delhi to Hyderabad. The train took numerous turns and passed through many regions. Yet my compass guided me to the direction of prayer all along. It was unaffected by the movement of the train. I was struck by this mechanical device. How constant and sincere it was. It kept on guiding me to the right direction, irrespective of the changes being made around it. In contrast, man, who is the supreme

creature, changes his way at every opportunity. I trusted my compass and offered my prayers on the basis of the information it provided. My compass was unmoved by its circumstances. So doing, it served its purpose well. Like a compass, *'Ulamā'* should keep on guiding the community. They should perform their duty, no matter how adverse the circumstances might be. *'Ulamā'* hold a place of distinction in the community. They should serve as a compass, commanding the respect of community members. Let it be recalled that all Muslims are obliged to face the same *qiblah*. By the same analogy, they should follow *'Ulamā'* in their life. Their overall objective should be to win Allah's pleasure.

In matters of belief and *Sharī'ah* rulings *'Ulamā'* should be firm. They should not show any leniency even to a mighty emperor. Rather, they should hold fast to *Sharī'ah* rulings and articles of faith. For these are beyond compromise. There is a world of difference between deference to worldly power and adopting a strategy in the larger interests of the community. They should not betray any flattery to rulers. They can state the truth tactfully without showing any sign of weakness. Of course, they should invite people to Islam with tact and admonition. However, any laxity in matters of faith is out of the question. The Qur'ān warns: "*The unbelievers wish that you should compromise (in religion) with them; so they too would compromise with you.*" (*al-Qalam* 68:9) The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was asked by Allah to promulgate polytheists. (*al-Ḥijr* 15:94) Whenever the doctrine of monotheism is at stake, a believer should turn away, without any consideration. Allowance may be made in certain matters. However, regarding monotheism, the *Sunnah*, *Sharī'ah* rulings and articles of faith no laxity is admissible. The Qur'ānic directive is very clear: divine injunctions are to be promulgated and in relation to polytheism no compromise is conceivable. It is therefore the bounden duty of *'Ulamā'* to take a firm stand on matters concerning monotheism. They should nonetheless act with tact. They should make their point well. If some mischief breaks out, *'Ulamā'* should try to control it, using moderate language. They should take firm steps

later. However, they should not leave the impression that they will reconcile themselves with falsehood. Islam has been preserved in its original form because of this approach. The truth cannot therefore be mistaken for falsehood. People are of course free to incur self-destruction. However, they cannot blame the *Sharī'ah* or *'Ulamā'* for their errors.

On studying history it emerges that the Muslim community as a whole has never fallen into error. There have been instances of some aberrations at local level. *Ḥadīth* proclaims however that Muslims as a whole cannot reconcile themselves to misguidance. In contrast, Judaism was corrupted at a very early stage. The same was true of Christianity which deviated from the straight way at the outset. The Qur'ān therefore, speaks of Christians as those in error.

By Allah's grace, Islam is preserved in its purity. Anyone can find out the vast difference between monotheism and polytheism, between the *Sunnah* and *jāhiliyyah* innovations and between the culture of Muslims and non-Muslims. A Muslim land may be corrupted for a time, brought under the influence of some invader or face some mischief. However, this is the exception. *'Ulamā'* have always been alive to the cause of truth. They are ever engaged in the reform and preservation of Islamic identity.

8. The role of *'Ulamā'* in changing times

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمِنْهُم مُّقْتَصِدٌ ۖ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٣٢﴾

Afterwards We made those whom We chose of Our servants the inheritors of the Book. Then of them there are some who wrong themselves. And of them there are some who keep the

middle path, and of them there are some who go ahead, by Allah's leave, in virtue. That is indeed great grace.
(*al-Fāṭir* 35:32)

A faith, divine teachings, a call to truth or noble ideals cannot and do not exist in a vacuum. Without role models in blood and flesh, high ideals cannot be sustained. This is amply borne out by the history of religions and morality. Had this not been the case and had it been in accord with human nature and divine laws scriptures would have descended on mountain tops with the proclamation that people should draw on these. This has not been the case, though. Allah first sends down His messengers. They are blessed with revelation. Messengers are the very embodiments of the divine message. Once ʿĀ'ishah was asked to relate the Prophet's conduct. In reply she said: "He demonstrated what the Qur'ān is." The Qur'ān is the best commentary on his life and morals. Allah gave another special favour to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), in the words of Shāh Walīullāh, by making his advent universal. He brought up an entire community to promote his message. Accordingly, the Qur'ān also speaks of the advent of the Muslim community in the following passages: *And thus We have made you a community justly balanced, that you might be witnesses to mankind and that the Messenger might be a witness to you.* (*al-Baqarah* 2:143) And: *You are the best community ever sent forth to mankind. You enjoin good and forbid evil and you believe in Allah.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:110)

Ḥadīth conveys the above message more emphatically, telling Muslims: "You have been sent down for making ease, not for erecting hurdles and hardship." Many Companions are on record as transmitting similar ideas. When the Persian commander asked Rubʿī ibn ʿĀmir, the Muslim emissary, as to why the Muslims had approached Persia, his reply was in line with the Prophet's teaching: "Allah has sent us to you that by His command we may free men from their bondage to fellow human beings and make them submissive to Allah." This brings home the point that messengers are the prerequisite for a faith. A

messenger should have a community trained and guided by him. These conditions were met in the case of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and his Companions. This arrangement should be in place until the Last Day.

It is evident from the Qur'ānic verse quoted at the outset of this section that successors to the Prophet and bearers of the Book will last to the end of time. Islam is the destiny of mankind, for it embodies divine teachings. In one *Ḥadīth* the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) makes this observation: "In every generation there will be just, pious people as the bearers of faith. They will avoid all extremism and accretions in matters of faith and refute the baseless notions of ignorant people." (*Mishkāt*)

'Ulamā' perform a very significant and delicate duty. Those charged with this role have indeed an onerous responsibility. On realising its magnitude one may feel so overwhelmed as to give up eating and drinking. *'Ulamā'*'s conduct keeps the masses on the straight way. It binds them to faith and its articles. *'Ulamā'*'s lapses conversely can have a disastrous effect. It can weaken their link with the public. Their immoral deeds may cause degeneration in the whole community, pushing it to decline, materialism, this-worldliness, lust for power, gratification of base desires and selfish motives. As a result, the community is liable to disintegrate into numerous divisions and sub-divisions. It can adversely affect the fate of the entire country and future generations. Religious institutions, including mosques might be afflicted with such decay and decline. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is on record as saying: "Remember, there is a piece of flesh in the body; if it is sound, the whole body functions well. However, if it is diseased, the entire body will be damaged. This piece of flesh is the heart."

'Ulamā' occupy the same position in the life of the community as the heart in the body. Any disorder affects the body and so the community. It is worth clarifying that the reform of the community is not the responsibility of any particular group or institution. Rather, it is the role of all *'Ulamā'*. If their morals are weakened by worldliness

and their links with Allah are not strong enough, the masses will exceed all limits. There will be all-round corruption and degeneration. The fate of faith is linked with the role and conduct of *'Ulamā'*. The moral health of a society and a country is in the hands of *'Ulamā'*. If *'Ulamā'* are derelict, faith will naturally grow weak. No oratory or political order can then salvage such an ailing society. Even if an Islamic state resolves to arrest moral degeneration, it cannot be successful without the active support of *'Ulamā'*.

To use an analogy, reference may be made to the small driving machinery or speedometer which monitors the speed and direction of a massive ship. Any disorder in it can lead the ship astray by hundreds of miles. As already stated, *'Ulamā'* should serve as the compass for the community. They should always be engaged in performing their duty. Providing they maintain a strong and close link with Allah, act sincerely, actively discharge their role and are characterised with the features special to the successors to Allah's Messengers, the future of faith is secure. Without this, no measure can ensure the spread of faith.

9. The role of Muslims in India

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ... ﴿٨٥﴾

And do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set right.

(*al-A'rāf* 7:85)

The above directive was delivered by the Prophet Shu'ayb (peace and blessings be upon him) to his community. This represents the teaching of all Allah's Messengers. All along they instructed men not to cause corruption. This directive is very wide in its coverage and reflects a genuine concern for human society. It goes beyond a general

instruction forbidding mischief, stressing that there is no room for disorder in society.

Once the land is marked with faith, which in turn permeates social life and culture, and there exist links between the Creator and men, chaos cannot be tolerated. For men are instructed in mutual relations and obligations. They are clearly told about the sanctity of life and property. They know how important cordial relations are in society. Once people follow these directives in their territory, the peace should not be disturbed, for such a society is only established after much striving. Many lay down their lives to protect their honour and sacrifice their self-interests to construct this society. Men should therefore learn to lead their lives as servants of Allah. They should maintain fraternity. For Islam teaches that all men are Adam's progeny and Adam was created from clay. In view of all these considerations men are urged not to cause corruption.

The Prophet Shu'ayb's directive above is expressive of his genuine concern. Allah's messengers imparted such lessons to mankind down the ages. They taught man how to imbibe moral values. They did not impart any technical skills. Nor did they encourage bloodshed or violence. On the contrary, they clarified that man's glory consists in leading life as a humble servant of Allah. Given all this, there is no room for rebellion and disorder.

It is significant that the above verse stresses that there should not be any corruption in the land after it has been set right. Reform involves the efforts of pious people. Then there is striving for this cause which may meet with success by Allah's leave. This is the history of all messengers. It is they who reformed society, rescued humanity and made life full of happiness and peace. As a result of their powerful teachings, men learnt to lay down their lives for their fellow human beings. They transformed the sinners into the pious. Their message prompted their followers to accomplish incredible examples of self-sacrifice and altruism.

It is not out of place here to recount the following incident in the days of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. In a battle a Muslim warrior

was in the throes of death. Someone offered him water. However, he pointed to another injured Muslim lying beside him, saying that water be provided first to the latter. When he was approached, he, in turn, said that another wounded Muslim be attended first. All of them attained martyrdom without taking water, while insisting that a fellow Muslim be helped first.

In Allah's sight, and also according to the messengers, it is a very serious crime to cause disorder in society. For, by definition, a society represents a network of many individuals. Likewise, one should not turn a blind eye to the moral disorder in one's midst, thinking that it will not affect one. Nor should one take lightly the incidence of violence in some part of the country. One should not suffer the delusion that such violence will not reach one's own locality. History testifies that such degeneration engulfs the whole of society sooner or later.

The above point is illustrated best by the following *ḥadīth*. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) remarked: "If some people are aboard a boat and they belong to two classes, some on the upper deck and others on the lower level, corresponding to the rich utilising the former and the poor the latter, then it is the rich who enjoy the greater comfort. (This incidentally underscores the Prophet's miraculous foreknowledge of the shipping industry, for such technology was barely latent in his day.) In this scenario, the poor are forced to go to the upper deck for their water supply. It thus goes without saying that water is spilled, no matter how carefully it is carried. As water splashes, it disturbs the occupants of the upper deck. Once this had occurred a few times, the rich refused the poor access to the water supply, saying that it caused them much inconvenience. In this way, the poor were required to fend for themselves. Since water is a basic necessity and the poor could not survive without it, they decided to make holes in the boat and draw water directly through these, for this would save them the trouble of going upstairs." The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) aptly pointed out that in such an eventuality, the rich would petition the poor not to make

any such holes, for it would be suicidal. Rather, they would press the poor to draw their water from upstairs, otherwise the boat would sink, killing all of them, rich and poor alike.

Since we have to lead out lives in this country, India, and since we belong to the same society and country, we should not act selfishly. If we think only of our own interests, this amounts to causing disorder in society. Today we are swayed by such selfishness, having no regard for others, and wholly neglecting collective interests. This malaise afflicts not only India, but the entire world.

It is the duty of Muslims to rise to the occasion and salvage the country which is on the brink of destruction. The government alone is not responsible for our safety. It has its own compulsions and constraints. The Qur'ānic directive is that we should not undo the invaluable contribution of our noble predecessors who were true adherents of faith, well-wishers of mankind and sincere builders of community and country. We should ensure that there is no corruption, for Allah will take us to task as to why, in our presence, our country faced destruction. We should present such excellent character and conduct whereby material pursuits, worldly positions and other labels of honour and glory are disregarded. What really matters is God-consciousness. We should have love and sympathy for everyone.

I must assure you that such conduct from Muslims would endear them to everyone. They would regain the leadership of the country thereby.

10. The responsibility of bearers of the Qur'ān

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى بَعَثَ فِى ٱلْأُمِّيِّـۧنَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ لَفِى ضَلَـٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢﴾

It is Allah Who has raised among the unlettered ones a Messenger from among themselves, rehearsing to them His

revelations and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, though they had been in gross error before.
(*al-Jumuʿah* 62:2)

Every activity related to the Qur'ān is worthy, be it memorisation, recitation, or interpretation. The above verse specifies the role and assignment of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

Essentially his assignment consisted of four main parts. Reciting the Qur'ānic verses was his first and foremost duty. In view of its importance it is mentioned first in the above description.

His next assignment was the purification, training and guidance of souls, by way of purging them of vices and infusing into them good morals and manners. The Qur'ān speaks of the Prophet's role thus in other places as well. For example: *Allah endeared faith to you and has adorned your hearts with it. He has made unbelief, wickedness and disobedience abhorrent to you. Such are the men of guidance.* (*al-Ḥujurāt* 49:7)

The Qur'ān was not revealed so as to be a book preserved in libraries or memories. It was sent down so that people should study, recite, memorise and act upon it. The most important objective behind its revelation was and is that men should mend their lives and attain self-development. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) accomplished these two tasks admirably. His Companions are a living testimony to his success. He helped them purify their selves perfectly. He trained them so well that they looked upon disbelief as something utterly loathsome. They were wholly devoted to faith and were ever ready to make any sacrifice in its cause. Their commitment to worship knew no bounds. Likewise, they served their fellow human beings. They managed to control selfishness and worldliness. Each and every Companion proved how successful the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had been in accomplishing the task of purifying them.

Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr, one of his Companions reports: "Once during the days when I was an unbeliever, I set out to molest the Prophet, something which even the unbelieving Quraysh had not dared to do. I found a golden opportunity, for he was alone around the Kaʿbah. I joined him and waited for an opportune moment to hit him just as I faced him. Spotting me he summoned me over and smiled as I stood facing him. He placed his hand on my chest. This purged me of all the hatred and hostility I held towards him. I then returned home. There was a woman, at whose house drinking parties were held. Stories were recounted there as well. When that woman saw me, she invited me to join her party. I, however, declined her offer, saying that I had embraced Islam." There are many such incidents in the early history of Islam when people, hostile to Islam, instantly accepted faith.

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ says: "I have passed through three important stages in my life. At one stage I was so hostile to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) that given an opportunity I would have ruined myself. However, Allah was graceful to me in that I did not get the chance to attack him. In my next phase, I grew so fond of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) that I could not even look at his face out of love and respect. I was unable to describe his features. For I lacked the courage to look upon his face. When I pledged my allegiance to him, placing my hand in his, I did not withdraw my hands. He asked me why I did not release his hands. I explained that I did this out of my intense love for him. I asked him about my fate in view of my sins. He replied: 'Do not you know that on acceptance of Islam one's earlier sins are obliterated.'"

Numerous other such incidents form part of early Islamic history. Take the example of Waḥshī who had killed Ḥamzah ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, even disfiguring the latter's dead body. When he appeared before the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to pledge his oath of allegiance, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) duly received him, accepting his pledge. He said only this much to Waḥshī: "Do not appear too often before me. For I am reminded

of my uncle." This was quite natural, demonstrating as it did the Prophet's tender emotions. Waḥshī was nonetheless transformed after his acceptance of Islam. He was fired with faith and spirituality and was envied by many for his devotion. Later on, the same Waḥshī killed Musaylimah the liar, a false claimant to messengership. On reading this account I am always struck by Waḥshī's conduct. On the one hand, he deprived the Muslims of Ḥamzah, the Prophet's beloved uncle, who was a source of strength for early believers. To expiate this misdeed he later killed someone who was abhorrent in the Prophet's sight. In this way, he had encounters with a great supporter of Islam and with its sworn enemy who had sought to challenge all that Islam stood for. So doing, Waḥshī offered the best possible compensation. The Prophet's soul would have felt elated over Waḥshī's good deed, prompted by his religious fervour.

Other Companions gained much moral and spiritual development under the Prophet's guidance. They turned into paragons of virtue. Their beliefs, morals, manners and conduct were vastly improved, as Islam drove them from ignorance into faith, from *jāhiliyyah* into guidance, imparting them with knowledge and wisdom.

Another of the Messenger's assignments was to instruct people in the Book. This development in his assignments followed a natural order. First, the verses of the Book were recited and then the listeners purified, morally and spiritually. Included in this was elucidation of the Book, its underlying message, wisdom and objectives. This last aspect covered instructing people in the Book. In this way readers and listeners of the Qur'ān were and are trained to develop insights into faith. Allah has said that He grants insights into faith to one whom He intends to do a favour.

This account relates to the duties and conduct of the bearers of the Book. It was exemplified by the Prophet's Companions who were *'Ulamā'* and whose knowledge was appreciated by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). He asked other Muslims to turn to them for guidance. For example, he spoke highly of Ubayy ibn Ka'b's understanding of faith, saying that he possessed a remarkable

perception of the Qur'ān. Zayd ibn Thābit, a scribe of the Qur'ān, was also a knowledgeable Companion. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also admired ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd's grasp of the Qur'ān. Regarding ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās he supplicated to Allah that they be blessed with insights into the Qur'ān and faith. These four Companions were excellent students and teachers of the Qur'ān, imparting their knowledge to others.

At a later stage, many successors to the Companions excelled in this field, for example, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. To the same category of teachers and scholars of the Qur'ān belong Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn and Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyib. They were followed by other noble souls who enjoyed mastery over the Qur'ān. Among the many leading *Ḥadīth* scholars, jurists and Sufis special mention may be made of Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ, Maʿrūf al-Karkhī, Imām ibn Ḥanbal and Junayd al-Baghdādī.

In the next stage of our history decline gradually set in. Knowledge became specialised and compartmentalised and community fragmented into many different groups. Each scholar became an expert in his field of specialisation. Some focused on recitation of the Qur'ān, memorised it and taught people how to pronounce the Qur'ānic words correctly. They developed the art of reciting the Qur'ān. May Allah grant them ample reward in that they performed a highly useful service for the whole community. They also improved and preserved the sound of Qur'ānic recitation. Let us recall that under divine care the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had recorded the Qur'ān, which was compiled by Abū Bakr and from which standard copies were sent by ʿUthmān to various parts of the Muslim world.

Some took up the vocation of teaching the Qur'ān and amplifying its wisdom. They brought out the underlying message of the Qur'ān and promoted its study.

Sufi masters specialised in training their disciples spiritually. They regarded it as their duty to provide moral and spiritual training to people. They developed the branch of morals and self-development. It is hard to enumerate even the names of the large number of Sufis so

skilled. One must, at least, however refer in this context to Khawājah Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshbandī, Khawājah Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī and Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī.

There were others who devoted themselves to the task of community reform and self-development. They waged a battle against whatever innovations had crept into faith. They revived the true message of Islam. On this count the following deserve mention – Mujaddid Alf Thānī, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, Shāh Walīullāh Dihlawī, Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and Ashraf 'Alī Thānwī, for they benefited greatly the generality of Muslims in their day.

Bearers of the Qur'ān must do more than recite or memorise the Book, as also do more than read its passages at public meetings. Their role is specified thus by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): "One endowed with knowledge of the Qur'ān will be punished, if he sleeps through the night and misses *Fajr* Prayer." Bearers of the Qur'ān are further charged with the role of acting upon it. For example: in the Battle of Yamāmah there was fierce fighting, but, this did not reach any conclusion; one of the Companions exclaimed: "O bearers of the Qur'ān! O those who preserve the Qur'ān in their breast! It is time to act on the Qur'ān. Lay down your lives for its sake. If the mischief of apostasy is not put to an end once and for all, it will sow doubts about the Qur'ān." Memorisers of the Qur'ān were deeply moved by this address and resolved to sacrifice their lives. In this way they demonstrated their utmost commitment to faith. Allah says regarding the Qur'ān: *It is inscribed in honoured writs, exalted and purified. By the hands of scribes who are esteemed and virtuous.* (*'Abasa* 80:13-16)

Although the pointed reference in the above passage is to angels it nonetheless conveys the features of bearers of the Qur'ān. It specifies that bearers of the Book should be characterised by such features. That only the pure touch it signifies that it is the privilege of the pious to master the Qur'ān. Those Companions who had memorised the Qur'ān excelled all others in their piety and unblemished conduct. While seeing to the burial of martyrs after the Battle of Uḥud the

Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) directed that those who had learnt the Qur'ān most be placed in the front row. In this way, we appreciate that we should not only learn the Qur'ān by heart, but be conversant also with its message. In other words, bearers of the Qur'ān undertake an onerous responsibility.

Let us realise how privileged we are to possess the Word of God. We have been imparted with divine knowledge. We have the key to master all that is in the universe. On the merits of the Qur'ān the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) informed us: "One will be rewarded ten times for each and every word of the Qur'ān." To illustrate the point he recited the opening part of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*: "*Alif Lām Mīm*", adding that one reciting it would receive his reward thirty times. He also said: "The best one among you is the one who studies and teaches the Qur'ān."

The merits of reciting the Qur'ān are numerous. If one who has memorised it recites it during the blessed month of Ramaḍān at nights in the mosque and charges money for this, it is hard to condone his conduct. How can he reconcile himself to petty monetary gain for such an invaluable service? Once a spiritual master exclaimed: "Were someone to offer me a vast empire in return for the reward I would get on pronouncing Allah once, I would never accept this bargain." Let us realise well that the Qur'ān is the Word of God and that it is the most precious thing on earth. It is eternal, for it is from Allah. Nothing could be more valuable than it. We should, therefore, appreciate this wealth. Those possessing the invaluable wealth of the Qur'ān should never be lured by worldly things. We should not covet money or other valuables.

Ibn Taymiyah used to say: "My enemies cannot harm me in the least. For the Qur'ān is preserved in my breast. They cannot deny Paradise to me. I possess divine knowledge. They cannot imprison me. For with this blessing I enjoy perfect freedom. I will be free, no matter where I live."

Some people gain spiritual development whereas others fail. It depends on one's intention. Those who hold the Qur'ān in great

esteem are likely to attain the heights of spirituality. Shāh Muḥammad Yaʿqūb was adept in using effective parables for this helped him illustrate even the most delicate and complex of points. Once he talked of having reverence for something. Maḥbūb ʿAlī Khān, the ruler of Hyderabad, Deccan, India, used to make his rounds at night under the guise of gaining first-hand information about his subjects. One night he boarded a carriage and was joined by someone. He asked his co-passenger about the general state of affairs. Since the latter did not recognise him, he frankly told him that people were highly critical of Maḥbūb ʿAlī Khān in view of his such and such misdeeds. In this way he abused the ruler to his heart's content for it was dark inside the carriage. After a few moments he took out his cigarette and as he lighted it, he recognised the ruler. This made him panicky. However, the ruler assured him, saying that he would not take him to task for insulting him. While recounting the above incident, the Shāh pointed out that the ruler was there all the time. The other person changed his stance only when he realised that he was face to face with him. Gaining this knowledge he reacted in a totally different way. The same holds true for our outlook on the Qur'ān. We know that this Book is the Qur'ān which we studied in our childhood. The Qur'ān has remained unaltered since the day it was sent down. Only when we look upon it as the Word of God addressed to us does our outlook on it change. We then realise its glory and exalted status. Allah says regarding the Qur'ān: *Had We sent down this Qur'ān on a mountain, you would have seen it humbling and disintegrating into pieces in awe of Allah.* (*al-Ḥashr* 59:21)

Allah has sent down His perfect Book, of which the passages are similar and oft-repeated. Believers tremble as they hear Allah's name. They are irresistibly drawn to Him. One should then have the utmost respect and reverence for the Qur'ān and approach it with the intention of winning Allah's reward. We should be firmly persuaded of divine reward. With such an outlook on the Qur'ān one can attain spiritual heights.

The Qur'ān is the best means to gain proximity with Allah. One can also achieve this state by reciting the Qur'ān in additional prayers. A seeker of truth is devoted to remembrance of Allah. The last stage in spiritual development is the frequent and extensive recitation of the Qur'ān. Faḍl al-Raḥmān Ganj Murādabādī maintains that the surest way to draw near to Allah consists in reciting the Qur'ān. One should be fully alive to the greatness of the Qur'ān and believe that divine rewards will accrue from reciting it. While studying it one should think all along that one will be rewarded manifold for it. One should have a genuine, keen desire to study it. One's perception of these truths will inspire one to undertake a sincere and meaningful study of the Qur'ān.

One should not, however, take it as a profession. One should better opt for some worldly pursuit. On the Day of Judgement such will be in a better condition who earned their bread through some lawful means than those religious scholars who used their knowledge of the Qur'ān to make money. There are businessmen who are engaged in some trade or other to support themselves and their family. Along with their profession, however, they remember Allah, fear Him and invoke His forgiveness. They are better placed in the Hereafter than such religious scholars who resort to making the Qur'ān their source of income.

Since we have been blessed with the Qur'ān, we should try to develop the spirit of assimilating its message. This is possible only when we fear Allah and lead a pious life. If we join the company of noble, devout souls, we may be imbued with the above features. We need however to strive in this cause. To make ourselves compatible with the Qur'ān we have to do some hard work. Even non-Muslims can memorise the Qur'ān. I know many non-Muslims in Egypt and Syria who have learnt the Qur'ān by heart. What is essential, however, is the true spirit for imbibing the message of the Qur'ān so as to improve our conduct.

Once I accompanied Mawlānā Ilyās in a carriage on a journey and told him that the insights into the Qur'ān which I gained in this journey could not be possessed by me at home. The Mawlānā

endorsed my observation. Those who bear in mind the message of the Qur'ān on a *Jihād* battleground and in service to the cause of Islam are destined for exalted status.

We must strive to derive maximum benefit from our study of the Qur'ān. May Allah grant us the strength and ability to respect the Qur'ān, to act upon it, to enjoy its study and to use it as the means to draw closer to Him.

[IX]

The Blessed Prophet and the Holy Places

1. A mercy unto the worlds

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا رَحۡمَةٗ لِّلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ١٠٧

And We have sent you [O Prophet] as the mercy unto the worlds.

(*al-Anbiyā'* 21:107)

Mercy is the most valuable virtue for man's existence. For all human beings stand in need of it. A merciful heart is valued by everyone. Mercy is the pressing need of everyone, be he a scholar or a lay person, a conqueror or a vanquished man, an intelligent or stupid person, and a backward or advanced community. No one can deny its importance and usefulness. At times one may not need power or knowledge. However, mercy is needed all the time and by everyone.

Allah possesses everything. He could bless His Messenger with anything, say even an empire. Accordingly, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) could have set up the largest empire on earth. It is an altogether different point that in a later stage the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon

him) conquered almost all parts of the world in the north and south, the east and west. They erected a distinct culture and civilisation and promoted knowledge. In view of all these accomplishments the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) may be legitimately acclaimed as a great moral teacher. Had Allah bestowed the epithet of reformer on the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) no one could contest this. Rather, intellectuals, thinkers, scholars and historians alike would have endorsed it. For he undoubtedly happens to be the greatest teacher and reformer of mankind.

Allah could have characterised him with any other feature. However, the essence of his message and career is best reflected in his virtue of mercy. Accordingly, the Qur'ān proclaims that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent down as a mercy unto the worlds.

Mercy is Allah's favourite attribute. He introduces Himself as the Most Merciful One in the opening part of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*. Reference to the same attribute occurs in the *basmalah*. Here then is the opening of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*, with which the Qur'ān commences: *In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. All praise is to Allah, Lord of the worlds. He is Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.* (*al-Fātiḥah* 1:1-3)

Elsewhere, Allah states in the Qur'ān: "My mercy embraces everything." Hence the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is also described with reference to the same exalted attribute of mercy.

Mercy reached the whole of mankind through the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and in generous measure. Every tribe, country and race drew upon his mercy. For through him man gained access to Allah. It was indeed a blessing for mankind. Men and women, the poor, slaves and even animals received his favours in large measure. One cannot even recount the immense favours done by him to mankind. On studying the Qur'ān and works on *Sīrah* one learns how he acted kindly towards all sections and classes of mankind.

He forbade injustice and instructed that wages be paid to a labourer as soon as he finished his work. He gave glad tidings to honest traders and spoke highly of those who brought orphans up well. He insisted that obligations towards women be fulfilled. He raised the status of slaves and struck a fatal blow to social distinctions based on colour and race. He treated prisoners well. His mercy towards mankind lies at the core of all of his teachings. He directed warriors not to put the injured to death, not to molest those in hermitage, not to harass children and women, not to damage crops and trees and not to demolish the places of worship of other faith communities.

He was the embodiment of mercy. People may not believe in his Messengership, yet no one can deny the favours he performed for mankind. At the time of his advent in the sixth century, humanity was steeped in error and darkness. Men were reduced to beasts. The powerful exploited the weak without check. Rulers thrived in oppressing commoners. On studying the accounts of the Roman Empire or of Europe generally, as recorded in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and *A History of European Morals*, one feels aghast at the instances of cruelty and the shows of wealth. The rich traded on the poor to enjoy their nightly feasts. While the élite dined and wined, the poor were bled to death. Injustice was rampant, at its ugliest. Alexander and Caesar were engaged in conquests, causing misery to millions. Lust for power made rulers behave madly, so much so that they had no qualms in exploiting their own countrymen. Humanity suffered badly and miserably. Men had disregarded God and worshipped a pantheon of false gods and goddesses. Corruption had raised its ugly head everywhere. Vices were extolled whereas virtues were derided. Furthermore, there was no one to challenge these vices. There were talented human beings all around – poets, wrestlers and other skilled men – however, no one had the courage to arrest the spread of evil. No one presented the case of truth. Despondency loomed large. For there was no indication that humanity could ever be free from the shackles of vice and evil. Rulers, poets and philosophers were too helpless to take any step. There was inaction and misery

all around. Against this backdrop. Allah sent down His Messenger to earth, who represented a mercy for all humanity. His Qur'ānic appellation is therefore, perfectly apt and sound.

2. The blessed Prophet

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا رَحۡمَةٗ لِّلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ١٠٧

And We have sent you [O Prophet] as the mercy unto the worlds.

(*al-Anbiyā'* 21:107)

In this Qur'ānic passage Allah pointedly tells the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) that he has been sent down as "the mercy unto the worlds". This is indeed a highly significant proclamation, underscoring the height of Allah's mercy. Let us not disregard the equally important point that this proclamation features in the Qur'ān, the Scripture valid until the Last Day. Being the final divine message it is destined to be recited throughout all stages of history. It is part of divine dispensation that billions of men and women will draw upon it till the end of time. It is taken for granted that many men will devote themselves fully, throughout history, to studying and interpreting it, while closely analysing its each and every word. It is also part of divine providence that some will doubt its veracity and contest its authenticity. They will evaluate its contents by a strict measure. In sum, the inexhaustible study of the Qur'ān will be there until the Last Day.

Generally speaking, when one issues a public statement or writes a piece for a magazine, which has a limited readership restricted to a particular time and place, one revises it several times, lest it contain any point which might be challenged by others. One is apprehensive of being contradicted or refuted. One is therefore very particular about the accuracy of one's statements. Books have a relatively longer life, extending farther than that of a magazine. At times, some books are

studied for years. In exceptional cases the impact of a book many last for centuries. The author of a book is therefore, more careful about his work. Before writing a book he painstakingly selects his material, weighs it critically and anticipates the reaction of his readers.

Against this backdrop let us study what Allah says about this proclamation in the Qur'ān which is introduced thus by Him: *Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or from behind it. It is a revelation from the All-Wise, All-Praiseworthy.* (*Fuṣṣilat* 41:42)

And, regarding the Qur'ān it is also asserted: *We have sent it (the Qur'ān) as Admonition and We are its custodian.* (*al-Ḥijr* 15:9)

One cannot pass lightly over the bewildering magnitude and time-space ambit of this proclamation. In terms of time scale, it means that the proclamation is valid from the Prophet Muḥammad's advent until the Last Day. He will continue to be a source of mercy for all human beings during all subsequent generations. In sum, it embraces a time span of thousands of years.

As to its spatial limits, it covers the whole world. The Prophet as mercy is not special to the Arabian peninsula. Nor is it restricted to the Orient or Asia. Rather, the assertion is that as divine mercy he embraces the entire world. No one is beyond or outside the ambit of his mercy.

This proclamation should serve as a challenge for all historians, philosophers, thinkers and writers. They should evaluate what is being said and its veracity. For one does not come across such an emphatic and sweeping proclamation in the history of faiths, rather in the entire intellectual history of mankind. It is a cryptic, pithy and universal statement, which is not to be found in any other religion or history of ideas or philosophical movement. It does not feature in the accounts of any earlier messenger.

Generally, to discern the value of something we look at both its quantity and quality. The Qur'ānic proclamation about the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) takes into account both quantitative and qualitative aspects. His noble message, his illustrious personality and his life-enriching teachings have benefited humanity across the

board. His message rejuvenated mankind and offered a panacea to the ailments afflicting society. Furthermore, his advent opened the gate of divine blessings and mercy. Taken together, his appearance on the scene brought about both quantitative and qualitative change.

As to the mercy flowing from him, this may be explained in terms of the immense benefits which accrued to mankind, thanks to his mission. It goes without saying that kindness and mercy are very wide-ranging concepts. Included in them are such small favours as offering someone a glass of water or giving them directions or comforting them in climatic rigours. We know how affectionate mothers are towards their children. Fathers arrange for the education and training of their children and provide them with the basic necessities of life. Another act of kindness is teaching someone. Imparting education represents a major favour. Some other common manifestations of kindness are feeding the hungry and giving clothes to the needy. One must be grateful to he who does one any such favour.

Nonetheless, it would be a greater act of kindness and mercy if one rescued a dying person and relieved the suffering of those in distress. One may imagine the situation of a child in the throes of death, with his parents full of grief and agony, too helpless to do anything. At this stage if a physician then appeared on the scene, as an angel of mercy, consoling and assuring the panic-stricken parents that his medicine would help the child recover, he would be warmly greeted as an angel. The mercy shown by him overshadows all other acts of kindness. For he not only saved the life of that child, he gave new life to the whole family.

Let us take another example. As a blind person is about to fall into a ditch or well, he is rescued in the nick of time, and his saviour is regarded as an angel. The same holds true for saving a youth who is about to be drowned. In such life-saving situations those extending help are highly praised and remembered with much gratitude for a long time.

Yet the greatest manifestation of mercy is to save the whole of humanity which is destined to face loss, destruction, and eternal

perdition. Given this, the mercy shown by Allah's Messenger to mankind by way of saving them from divine punishment is indeed immense. Messengers of Allah guide mankind to the straight way, and in their absence man is liable to incur self-destruction. The Messengers however steer humanity towards salvation. They are therefore to be taken as the greatest saviours and benefactors of mankind. They help fellow human beings reach their destination. Mankind stands eternally beholden to them for the knowledge they provided. They deserve thanks also for their life-ennobling teachings which are a source of relief and comfort for mankind. They also warn mankind against their foes.

It may be recalled that during the *jāhiliyyah* period humanity had strayed and forfeited its privileged position of being Allah's supreme creation. Mankind was on the brink of losing its exalted status. It was then that Allah sent down the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), emphasising that he would stand out as mercy for mankind. On this count he excels all of Allah's other Messengers.

3. The Prophet's affection towards mankind

لَقَدْ جَآءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ
حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُم بِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٨﴾ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا
فَقُلْ حَسْبِىَ ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ ۖ وَهُوَ رَبُّ ٱلْعَرْشِ
ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٢٩﴾

Surely there has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Hard upon him is what bothers you, and who is concerned for you and is affectionate and merciful towards the believers. If then, they turn away, say: "Sufficient unto me is

Allah. There is no god but He. In Him I put my trust, and He is the Lord of the mighty throne."

(*al-Tawbah* 9:128-129)

The overarching concept of mercy pervades the above account of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). Mercy consists in taking pity on someone, helping him, sharing his sufferings and striving to alleviate his misery. These are the qualities which characterise the conduct of every decent person. Allah is the Most Merciful of all those who show mercy. Allah has infused the virtue of kindness into human beings in varying degrees. The kindest person has been the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), as is evident from the above Qur'ānic passage. He is hurt by the slightest discomfort experienced by any fellow Muslim. He does not approve of anything which may prove hard for them. His concern for them is genuine and broad in range. All along he is worried about their welfare. His kindness towards fellow believers knows no bounds.

It is common knowledge that parents are affectionate towards their children. A mother's love for her child is proverbial. If one claims that one loves someone more than their mother does, one's claim is dismissed outright. Such a claim is not entertained and is rejected in that it smacks of hypocrisy and falsehood. Allah has infused love between parents and children. This filial love has been there since the beginning of the world. It is part of the law of nature. By the same token, our spiritual training programme has always been taken care of by Allah's messengers. Their love for mankind is far greater than that of parents for their children. It is beyond one's capacity to relate the immeasurable love which messengers have for the believing members of their respective communities. They share their sorrows and sufferings. Every slight discomfort for their followers pains these messengers. They are disturbed if even a single member of their community is in trouble. We cannot measure their overflowing concern for their fellow human beings.

The Qur'ānic passage quoted above should give us some idea of the Prophet's affection and concern for his fellow Muslims. The same was practically demonstrated throughout his distinguished career in that he was anxious about their ultimate end and displayed the utmost sincerity and affection to them. What made him more sensitive to their cause was his descent from the same tribal origin. He knew well their suffering and shared it with them. Had he been from another tribe, culture or country, he would not have readily sensed their plight. It goes without saying that those with a common bond of fraternity share mutual sorrow. The closer the ties, the keener the realisation of the pain suffered by them. Otherwise, people living in the same locality turn indifferently to the problems staring them in the face. We know well that provinces and countries are very broad in size. People living in the same village often fail to learn about one another's misery. This is not, however, true of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Being one of them he recognised their problems and felt disturbed at whatever tormented them. Out of this affection and concern for them he was pained by their every discomfort. Their suffering made him restless. He was always keen to ensure their welfare. His main concern was that all those around him should turn into sincere servants of Allah and accordingly enjoy His mercy and forgiveness. Their negligence in matters of faith hurt him. He was averse to their disbelief lest it land them in Hellfire. He tried his level best to keep them away from Satan's spell. Rather, he instructed them all along to draw closer to Allah which would help them win His mercy.

He was immensely kind and affectionate towards believers. It is hard to measure the depth of his concern for them. It was much more intense than filial love for an only child. An instance in point was the Prophet's anxiety over the suffering of the disbelieving Makkan prisoners of war who had come to Madīnah as invaders during the Battle of Badr. He felt restless on their count even while he prayed. It is on record that he offered prayers with total devotion. He derived immense pleasure and satisfaction from performing prayers.

He would often summon his Companion, Bilāl to recite the *adhān* which brought him much joy and tranquillity. This he did while he was engaged in the work of Islam, deliberating on the ways and means to spread the message of Islam and to elucidate the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*. His request to Bilāl for *adhān* bears out his dedication to Prayer. At the same time he had an overflowing love and affection for his community members.

It is related on the Prophet's authority: "At times while I lead prayers, I hear a child crying. My fervent desire is to offer a prolonged prayer, immersing myself in the recitation of the Qur'ān and turning wholly to Allah by way of invoking Him and crying for Him, yet I stop myself from prolonging my prayer, thinking of that crying child. For I realise that his mother, saying prayers behind me in congregation will be in distress." It is worth clarifying that at that time women visited mosques to offer prayers, for it was a time marked by social harmony and moral excellence. Since the level of behaviour was good, women were allowed to visit mosques along with their male relatives such as their father, husband or children. The Prophet, while engaged in prayer, originally planned to make extensive supplications to Allah but the cries of the child led him to shorten his prayer and supplication. For this would enable the mother of the crying child to give succour. Being restless she could not concentrate on her prayer, thinking of her child crying. In view of her condition the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) concluded the prayer at the earliest opportunity. Those who appreciate the spirit of prayer will readily recognise the great sacrifice so made by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). For during prayer he turned totally indifferent to his surroundings. While offering prayer he profusely cried and earnestly invoked Allah. Yet he cut short his prayer in view of a crying child so that his mother would not be disturbed. This reflects his caring attitude towards his community. On another occasion the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used the following parable to illustrate his relationship with the believing community: "The parable indicating the relationship between you and me is as if someone lit up a fire,

visible at a distance which attracts people. On rainy nights moths crowd around light in large numbers and are soon consumed by fire. Your example is of moths that surround fire. You are on the brink of falling into Hellfire. O men! You draw too close to Hellfire. I drag you by your waist in order to keep you away from Hellfire." This brings into sharp relief the Prophet's role regarding his community. His concern for the Hereafter is recorded thus in the Qur'ān: *You are, as if going to kill yourself over their footsteps out of sorrow, for they do not believe in this discourse.* (*al-Kahf* 18:6)

Essentially, the Prophet was very keen that no member of his community should ever be consigned to Hell. Rather, he wanted that each one of them be admitted to Paradise.

4. The outstanding features of Makkah

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِيمُ رَبِّ ٱجْعَلْ هَٰذَا ٱلْبَلَدَ ءَامِنًا وَٱجْنُبْنِى وَبَنِىَّ أَن
نَّعْبُدَ ٱلْأَصْنَامَ ﴿٣٥﴾

And recall when Abraham said: "Lord! Make this city secure and keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols."
(*Ibrāhīm* 14:35)

One gathers from the above Qur'ānic account that the divine message emanating from Makkah is characterised by the following:

i. The call to pure monotheism. For the Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) pointedly invokes Allah so that he and his progeny be spared from idolatry. Many centuries had passed during which time men had indulged in idolatry, in the all-round *jāhiliyyah*, obliging the Prophet Abraham to make the above radical proclamation from Makkah. It may be recalled that he had also built the House of Allah in Makkah.

ii. The Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) urges his family members and all believers of a later date to offer prayer regularly and to devote themselves to worshipping Allah in the following words: *Our Lord! I have caused some of my progeny to dwell in a valley where is no sown land, by Your Sacred House, our Lord, in order that they might establish Prayer.* (*Ibrāhīm* 14:37)

He selected such a place for constructing the House of Allah as was devoid of features which are essential for agriculture, trade, culture and civilisation. Instead, he chose a barren valley, neglecting fertile lands and centres, for the construction of Allah's House and as the abode for his followers and progeny.

iii. The emphasis is on turning to Allah Who creates favourable conditions, rather than on favourable conditions themselves. The believers are asked to place their trust in Allah, the Supreme Lord, as is evident from the Prophet Abraham's supplication: *Therefore make the hearts of some of mankind to yearn towards them and provide them with fruits so that they may give thanks.* (*Ibrāhīm* 14:37)

It is on record that the Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) plunged into a fire, to demonstrate his trust in Allah as a true believer. So doing, he proved that fire or the four elements or forces of nature are dependent upon Allah. They cannot accomplish anything of their own accord. They cannot act independently of His will. Not unsurprisingly, by Allah's command, this fire turned into something cool and secure for Abraham: *We commanded: "O Fire! Be coolness and safety for Abraham."* (*al-Anbiyā'* 21:69)

It is incumbent on Makkans to imbue these characteristics. These should be part of their conduct. Makkah is referred to as a secure place. It should retain this essential feature, irrespective of the vicissitudes of time, the rise and fall of empires and advancements made in culture and civilisation. Time should not alter these features of the Makkans. It is borne out by both historical reports and *Ḥadīth* literature that ʿAmr ibn Luḥayy introduced idolatry into Makkah. He had imported some idols and promoted their worship there. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said

regarding him: "He is dragged into Hell by his entrails." We learn from historical reports that the idols of Hubal, al-Lāt, Manāt and al-ʿUzzā were imported to Makkah from Petra and Iraq; these were not then local deities. The day Makkah was conquered by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Kaʿbah was cleansed of idols, Makkah was restored to the pristine purity of the Abrahamic era. *Ḥadīth* contain the glad tidings that Makkah has been rendered immune from flagrant idolatry until the Last Day. It is therefore imperative that Makkah should retain its features of being a sanctuary and a bearer of the Abrahamic call. In this lies the exalted status and privileged position of this town and its inhabitants.

5. The sanctity of Makkah and Madīnah

وَمَن يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِإِلْحَادٍ بِظُلْمٍ نُّذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

Whosoever will seek profanity therein [the Sacred Mosque] wrongfully, We shall make him taste afflictive torment.

(*al-Ḥajj* 22:25)

This verse testifies to the miracle of the Sacred House and to Allah's absolute and perfect knowledge. By the sixth and seventh centuries the civilised world including the Arabian peninsula was aware only of land battles, fought in the open. The Makkans had experienced this firsthand as Abrahah's army, reinforced by elephants, had invaded Makkah in the sixth century. Allah however inflicted a humiliating defeat upon the invading army and repulsed it ignominiously. The Qur'ānic *Sūrah al-Fīl* contains its account. However, the Makkans had by then no inkling about the conspiracies and dangerous plans which were to be hatched in the future. The All-Knowing, All-Aware Allah Who has sent down the final Scripture forewarned the Makkan believers against this covert form of attack. The Qur'ān also spells out the divine punishment meted out to those guilty on this count.

Allah speaks of His House in Makkah in such terms which have deep and wide-ranging meaning. So much so that it is rather hard to translate these. What is nonetheless certain is that world peace is contingent on the sanctity maintained at Allah's House. As long as the Sacred Mosque is safe and secure, man's spiritual interests are protected. Whoever violates its sanctity and abuses the Ka'bah for political ends will be severely punished by Allah.

It is worth recalling that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the Quraysh chief and the Prophet Muḥammad's ancestor, had clearly told Abraha that the Ka'bah would be protected by its Master. This truth prevailed then and will be in force until the end of time.

Respect for the House of Allah is a living sign of one's commitment to Islam and faith. It serves as a barometer of the Muslims' attachment to their religious sanctities. As long as Muslims are loyal to Makkah and Madīnah and repulse all moves which betray any disrespect to these two holy places, Muslims' ties with Islam will remain firm enough to sustain their faith. Muslims must however display solidarity and unity in this important domain.

6. The status of Makkah

رَّبَّنَآ إِنِّيٓ أَسۡكَنتُ مِن ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيۡرِ ذِي زَرۡعٍ عِندَ بَيۡتِكَ ٱلۡمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ ... ﴿٣٧﴾

Our Lord! I have caused some of my progeny to dwell in a valley where is no sown land, by Your Sacred House, our Lord, in order that they might establish Prayer.

(*Ibrāhīm* 14:37)

Implicit in the above is the Prophet Abraham's designation of this valley as a sacred site until the Last Day. The valley stands out for being a barren place, without cultivation. Were it to flourish

some day with greenery, orchards, barns, an abundance of food and water, wealth and commerce, this would be a secondary point, a thing superficial. The Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) was fully conversant with the temperament of its inhabitants. He was best placed to make any assertion about this place. By Allah's leave and under divine instruction he had made some of his progeny settle in Makkah. In the above Qur'ānic passage he is seen submitting the same request to Allah.

This set once and for all the distinctive features of Makkah. Even in the face of all the divine blessings conferred on this town, in response to the Prophet Abraham's supplication for the same, this place would not lose its identity. Its link with the Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) would be maintained for ever.

The Prophet Abraham's statement is worth considering. He settled his progeny in Makkah so that they might establish prayer. They were to be the custodians of prayer for all time to come. He could have left his progeny behind in Iraq or on the banks of the Euphrates or in Egypt or Syria where his offspring could have established prayer. It is common knowledge that for centuries this whole region represented Muslim lands, with a predominantly Muslim population, engaged in offering prayer. However, Abraham insisted on settling his family in Makkah which lacked every vegetation for sustenance. His progeny then were to contemplate the rationale behind his selection of Makkah as their settlement. Had he been keen on their material prosperity, he would have chosen some fertile land or a centre of commercial activity. However, his opting for such an inhospitable place as Makkah signified his religious outlook. Makkah was best suited then for his mission to establish prayer.

Those living in Makkah, permanently or in transit, should be therefore, cognisant all the time of the inseparable link between *this* town and prayer. Their main objective all along should be to invite all human beings to worship Allah, the One True God, to affirm His Oneness, to bow before Him and to orient their lives in obedience of Him. They should strive to win His pleasure, to make their social and

economic life in line with His directives and to instruct people not to disobey Him. Rather, they should persuade everyone to follow His way. The message of this town is special. It heralds a life-giving call, which represents the dominance of spirituality over materialism, and which attaches more significance to the Hereafter in comparison to economic pursuits. It lays greater emphasis on good deeds emanating from sound beliefs, on morality and abundant love for Allah than on a sound economic system.

7. The Kaʿbah

جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْكَعْبَةَ ٱلْبَيْتَ ٱلْحَرَامَ قِيَـٰمًا لِّلنَّاسِ ... ﴿٩٧﴾

Allah has made the Kaʿbah, the Sacred House, a place of security for men.

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:97)

This point has largely gone unnoticed insofar as the working of this world is closely associated with the Kaʿbah and its message. We do indeed overlook this reality altogether. Those gifted with spiritual insight, however, realise this truth, grasping the scientific truth that mountains lend stability and equilibrium to the earth. By the same token, the higher system of functioning is related to the Kaʿbah. As long as its message is sustained, the present order will remain in place.

The real message and gift of Makkah is its religious call. Without it, man cannot attain success in this world or the Next. Its importance in relation to the latter is widely recognised. However, few people realise that man cannot gain worldly success without reference to his belief in the Hereafter. Such nation-states that have economic ties lead an unnatural way of life, one that is neither helped nor supported by Allah. The plethora of problems culminating in mankind's plight result from a lack of consideration for the Hereafter. So much so that

people are even ignorant of the purpose of their lives. As to the divine directive on this issue, we should be guided by the message embodied in the following Qur'ānic passage: *I have not created jinn and mankind but that they should worship Me. I do not seek any provision from them. Nor do I desire that they should feed Me. Surely Allah is the provider, owner of power, the firm.* (*al-Dhāriyāt* 51:56-58)

Those who neglect the truth enshrined in this passage hazard the loss of their better prospects in both worlds. Godless societies are prone to landing men in a mess. For such a mindset breeds fierce competition and confrontation between one individual and another, between one group and another and between one state and another. It culminates in the clash of their economic interests. One's loss is another's gain. This also gives rise to exploitation and injustice. As a result, mankind is faced with innumerable problems which lack any solution. Notwithstanding the efforts of their intelligentsia, they are unable to find a way out.

Regarding the Ka'bah, Allah asserts that it is the Sacred House, a place of security for all mankind. This divine dispensation is not contingent upon the cooperation extended by superpowers. Nor does it rely on military might. Nor does it entertain any link with the intellectual and culture centres of the world. The Ka'bah is associated only with the ideal of worshipping Allah. While raising the structure of the Ka'bah, the Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) earnestly supplicated that the House be used exclusively for proclaiming Allah's Oneness.

Seen in this context, it emerges that sound beliefs, good deeds and excellent conduct are the hallmarks of the message emanating from the Ka'bah. It instructs man in maintaining and strengthening ties of kinship, human solidarity, mutual love, respect for one's fellow human beings, sanctity of life and property and a God-conscious stance on everything. It is not dependant upon science and technology. Rather, the worldview anchored in science and technology poses a serious threat to man's existence on earth. For in literally no time at all a scientific invention is capable of destroying the whole world.

Divine dispensation is based on Allah's will and on those life-giving principles which were articulated by His messengers. Their message centred round the call made first by the Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) which was eventually accomplished by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The distinct manifestations of their mission are the Kaʿbah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madīnah.

Allah declared the Kaʿbah as a sanctuary and as a source of life and dignity for human beings. In this lies the key to man's survival and prosperity.



[x]
Materialistic Thought and Ideologies

1. Materialism and its limitations

وَٱضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا رَّجُلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَحَفَفْنَٰهُمَا بِنَخْلٍ
وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زَرْعًا ﴿٣٢﴾ وَلَوْلَآ إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ
لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِٱللَّهِ ... ﴿٣٩﴾

Recount to them the parable of two men. We made for one of them two gardens of vines and hedged both with palms, and We placed tillage in between ... Why then did you not say when you entered your garden: "Whatever Allah may will, there is no power, save in Allah?"

(*al-Kahf* 18:32 and 39)

In *Sūrah al-Kahf* the Qur'ān relates several stories. One of these is about a person who was granted two gardens by Allah. This parable is more relevant to everyday life, whereas that of the people of the Cave is a rarity that happens once in centuries. However, what befell this man with two gardens is applicable to all of us. We find his fate being re-enacted almost every day in our midst.

This man was a fortunate person, blessed with prosperity. He led a life of comfort, rather of luxury. He had two gardens of vines, surrounded with date palm trees. Besides, he had corn fields. All this was sufficient for leading life comfortably. Generally this is the acceptable standard of life. Natural resources were at his disposal and he owed his prosperity to these. Essentially, then, he was thriving on the produce from his two gardens: *Each of the two gardens brought forth the produce and failed not in the least therein. We caused a stream to flow in the midst of the two gardens.* (*al-Kahf* 18:33)

In sum, he was blessed with prosperity and raked in such means which brought him wealth and comfort. However, he was overcome by gross materialism. Rulers, landlords, public leaders, businessmen, industrialists and military generals often betray the same weakness, falling prey to materialism. This makes them grow indifferent to the dictates of faith and morality. They ascribe their success to their own knowledge, mental abilities and hard work. Korah was guilty of the same, as is evident from his assertion: *"I have achieved all this because of the knowledge I possess."* (*al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:78) The man in this story boasts in similar vein before his friend and even claimed: *I have more wealth than you have. And I enjoy more power and honour.* (*al-Kahf* 18:34)

He was so engrossed in his material possessions that he thought little about his Lord. He could not discern how divine blessings and natural resources were the real cause of his success. One who disregards Allah wrongs his own self. Such an attitude which is rooted in denying Allah and which is also grossly materialistic spells one's ultimate decline and fall. This man rejected in a very coarse way the concept of Allah's reckoning. Rather, he maintained that his prosperity would last for ever: *And he entered his garden, while he as a wrong-doer in respect of his own soul, and he said: "I do not consider that it will ever perish. Nor do I consider that the Hour is going to happen."* (*al-Kahf* 18:35-36)

Taking himself as a fortunate person who would enjoy divine blessings for ever, he thought that he was destined for honour and

success, wherever he might be: *If I am brought back to my Lord, I shall surely find something better in exchange.* (*al-Kahf* 18:36)

For him, sound beliefs and good deeds did not carry any weight. He regarded himself as self-sufficient. His friend, however, was alive to the truth. Allah had guided him to true faith. Since he was blessed with the gnosis of Allah and realised that Allah alone accomplishes everything in the universe and is the cause of every happening, he took strong exception to his friend's claim. He knew that Allah can change one's condition at any time. He therefore, vehemently opposed his friend's flawed stance. He brought home the following self-evident truths: *His companion said to him, as he spoke to him: "Are you a disbeliever in Him Who created you of dust, then of sperm, and formed you into a man?"* (*al-Kahf* 18:37)

Those given to pride and arrogance would not even listen to these basic truths. The companion, however, urged his friend to see reason, saying: *But He is Allah, my Lord and with my Lord I do not join anyone.* (*al-Kahf* 18:38)

He then stated the truth which permeates the whole of *Sūrah al-Kahf* – Allah controls and executes everything. One should not be misled by the apparent order of cause and effect. As the supreme Creator, He exercises total authority over all ways and means. One does not owe one's affluence to some cause. Nor is one to be credited for all that one has achieved. Rather, one's success represents Allah's power and authority. It is He Who has fashioned everything in the best mould. Hence the companion tactfully draws the attention of his friend to this truth: *Why did you not, as you went into your garden, say: "Allah's will be done! There is no power but with Allah."* (*al-Kahf* 18:39)

The story, particularly its following aspect, may be applied to our present civilisation, with all its advancements and materialistic pursuits:

> *Each of the two gardens brought forth its produce and failed not in the least therein. We caused a stream to flow in the midst of the two gardens. Abundant was the produce this man had.*

He said to his companion in the course of a mutual argument: "I have more wealth than you. And I enjoy more honour and power."

(*al-Kahf* 18:33-34)

The above readily brings to mind the example of the USA. It abounds in natural resources and like the two gardens, as referred to above, it does not fail in the least in its produce. It does not lack any provision. Notwithstanding the abundance of all material provisions, the USA is, nonetheless, wanting in God-consciousness, the point to which attention is drawn thus in the story: *Why did you not, as you went into your garden, say: "Allah's will be done! There is no power but with Allah."* (*al-Kahf* 18:39)

The USA, rather the entire world's present civilisation has turned godless. Yet turning to God can make people really wealthy and successful. For God-consciousness elevates materialistic pursuits to a lofty spiritual exercise. This helps man bridle his base self. As a result, man turns into Allah's obedient servant who reaches his destination without any difficulty. God-consciousness is the key to man's success. Regrettably, the Western world is devoid of this. That God's will be done should not be used merely as part of our everyday conversation. Rather, this truth should permeate our consciousness. Allah's will should be given credit for each and everything happening around us. It is a powerful expression, which makes one realise that Allah alone accomplishes all that happens. In itself, this helps man overcome his base self and his propensity towards pride and arrogance. We use this expression so freely and mechanically that we are no longer alive to its message. Let us realise clearly that Allah's will accounts for everything. Man cannot be credited with anything he is incapable of achieving on his own: "*All praise be to Allah, Lord of the universe.*" (*al-Fātiḥah* 1:1) The same truth is articulated elsewhere in the Qur'ān thus: *As to His affair and command, when He intends a thing, it is only that He says to it 'Be' and it becomes.* (*Yā Sīn* 36:82)

The above verse complements and supplements the Qur'ānic statement: "*There is no power but with Allah.*" Apart from Him,

no one enjoys any power or authority. True, the USA today may boast of possessing everything. God has made it truly rich with His bounties. Yet the USA does not provide mankind with any message of peace or happiness. It does not have any sincere, genuine friend, notwithstanding its numerous diplomatic and trade allies. There is no one to give a piece of sincere advice to the USA, as was provided by the companion to his friend in the above Qur'ānic story.

The USA lacks divine guidance, though it is a flourishing country with material provisions aplenty. Americans do not realise that the working of the universe is governed by God or that they owe all that they have to Allah and that they should do everything for pleasing only Him. They are neglectful of serving Him. Nor do they pay any heed to worshipping Him. The whole country is marred by godlessness.

The above Qur'ānic story presents two types of human beings – those given to materialism, rebellion, ingratitude and selfishness. At the other end of the scale are those who are firm believers in Allah, resourceless and poor. Notwithstanding their poverty, they enjoy the wealth of faith. In the story it is the latter who emphasises that worldly prosperity should be ascribed only to Allah. While drawing upon worldly bounties one should acknowledge one's debt of gratitude to Allah. One should thank Him sincerely for all of His blessings. The essence of the story is that all power rests with Allah alone. Man cannot achieve anything of his own volition.

It is therefore, logical that Allah directed the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and Muslims to place their trust only in Allah and to refer all of their affairs to Him, thus surrendering to Him completely. They were to pledge to abide by His will and decree: *And never say you of anything: "I am going to do that in the morning", except with the reservation that Allah so wills. And remember your Lord when you forget and say: "I hope that my Lord will guide me ever closer even than this to the right direction."* (*al-Kahf* 18:23-24)

One should genuinely believe in the depths of one's heart that Allah's will be done and that all power belongs only to Him. One who ascribes all perfection to Allah, trusts Him and looks forward

to His grace and favour cannot attach any significance to material resources or apparent causes. He cannot be misled by the promptings of his own self.

The Islamic formulae "Allah's will be done" and "There is no power but with Allah" appear as light statements and are uttered without thought. However, these are profound assertions of Allah's power and authority, packed with meaning. These strike a severe blow to blind materialism, self-centredness and the delusion of being independent of God.

2. Modern means of entertainment

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِى لَهْوَ ٱلْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

But there are among men those who purchase idle tales without knowledge or meaning to mislead men from the path of Allah and throw ridicule. For such there will be a humiliating penalty.

(*Luqmān* 31:6)

There are, in the main, two basic types of entertainment. To one belongs such intense interest in games and sports which make men negligent of their religious obligations. To the other is such idle talk which, once again, distracts man from performing his religious duties. In the above verse Allah speaks of both types – vain talk and idle tales. It is to the credit of the Qur'ān that the above description applies in equal measure to the latest modes of fun and entertainment, especially radio and television. For these constitute idle talk. The Qur'ān specially mentions that people purchase this. It goes without saying that today people spend large sums of money on purchasing various modes of entertainment.

Of course the Qur'ān does not specify television or radio on this count. For these gadgets did not then exist. Yet it is not altogether out of place to say that the Qur'ān disapproves of television and radio. Those familiar with Arabic idiom readily recognise that the Qur'ānic expression covers all forms of idle talk and entertainment. The Qur'ānic epithet "idle tales" stands for all radio programmes and videos. Let us be clear, however that the Qur'ān does not disapprove of games and sports. Nonetheless, television and radio belong to the category of "idle tales". Even at a time when such gadgets were unthinkable, the Qur'ān foretold these modes of entertainment which are no better than "idle tales".

3. Profanity in Western thought

بَلِ ادَّارَكَ عِلْمُهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ ۚ بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهَا ۖ بَلْ هُم مِّنْهَا عَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

Their knowledge can comprehend little of the Hereafter. They are in doubt about it. Nay, they are blind unto it.

(*al-Naml* 27:66)

This verse graphically states the Western mindset. Westerners' knowledge is seriously flawed. To use an analogy it represents a car with a flat tyre. This naturally results in the breakdown of the car. Western knowledge, no doubt, has made advancements, especially in rational sciences, physics, mathematics and metaphysics. However, on studying the divine being and attributes the Western mind appears to have gone astray. It cannot comprehend the concept of the Hereafter, and seems utterly confused with regard to it. Some Westerners are even seen expressing mental reservations and doubts about it. They are thus devoid of any insight into this issue. In Qur'ānic parlance, they are blind to it.

Another relevant Qur'ānic verse, which has been elucidated by Imām Ibn Taymīyah in his work *al-Nubuwwah* to illustrate the same point is as follows: *They deny what their knowledge cannot comprehend.* (*Yūnus* 10:39)

It is a common Western perception that what is not palpable is non-existent. To restrict beings to only those who are visible or palpable is essentially flawed reasoning. In turn, this severely affects man's knowledge base. Yet, the West takes its stance in this regard as its strength in the field of intellectuality. This has wreaked havoc on the human condition. It betrays a total disregard for the knowledge vouchsafed by Allah's messengers. Only those who do not pay any heed to the knowledge bestowed by Allah are liable to hold such a position. The Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings be upon him) portrayed such a mindset thus: *Do you dispute with me about Allah when He has guided me?* (*al-Anʿām* 6:80)

Almost the same truth lies at the core of the Prophet Muḥammad's speech delivered at Mount Ṣafā. He addressed the Quraysh while he was on the mountain top and the latter stood beneath him in the valley. He asked them whether they would believe his word if he were to tell them that an army stationed behind the mountain was about to swoop on them. These Makkan Arabs, though lagging behind others in their knowledge of philosophy and culture, possessed robust common sense. They realised all too readily that the statement was made by the one sitting on the mountain top, who could clearly see what lay ahead of him. They also knew him as a truthful, trustworthy person who never told a lie. Accordingly, they affirmed that they would endorse his contention. So doing, the Arabs excelled the Greeks and Romans, and Westerners of the day. They did not belie him simply because they could not see first-hand what he reported.

Whenever a comparison is made between the Islamic and Western worldviews and belief systems, the above distinction should be maintained. For it provides us with a sure means of grasping reality.

4. Satan's promptings

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّآ أَرْسَلْنَا ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ تَؤُزُّهُمْ أَزًّا ﴿٨٣﴾

Do you not see that We have set Satans against the unbelievers, to incite them with fury?

(*Maryam* 19:83)

Satan incites man in numerous ways. It is hard to enumerate the forms, degree and means of Satan's promptings directed at those who follow him. He facilitates the path of evil for his followers and tempts them in every conceivable way.

The Qur'ān makes a succinct observation that Satan prompts those given to doing evil. He fills them with false hopes and even makes them think that their evil deeds are all right. He makes them insensitive to sin.

This should not, however, be taken to mean that Allah has preordained evil for the unbelievers and that they cannot escape from doing evil. Rather, the Qur'ānic statement informs man of divine dispensation and of how Allah tests the unbelievers. Satans have been granted the opportunity to incite the evil-doers into committing sin.

As to the various forms of Satan's temptation, one can get a fair idea on studying popular literature, watching television and listening to the radio. The reference also covers all the temptations offered by Satan in man's financial, sexual, political and social life. Man is liable to fall prey to Satan at every step. For Satan has made misdeeds seem alluring to man.

While observing life in the world around us, especially in the USA, Europe, Asia and even Muslim lands, one is struck by the sheer magnitude of sins and the disobedience of Allah. Satan entices man in a variety of ways to commit sin. He fills man's heart with false hopes and prompts him to do evil. The Qur'ān makes it plain that Satan presents evil deeds as alluring to man. Man thus falls prey to

such temptation. It is also part of God's divine plan that there are champions of good who urge man to abide by the directives given in the Qur'ān. They instruct man in the message emanating from the Prophet Muḥammad's illustrious life, *Ḥadīth* and spirituality. They cite anecdotes related to spiritual masters. An instance in point is afforded by the volumes containing sermons of Sayyidinā ʿAbd al-Qādir, and Imām Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Their sermons guided many, including non-Muslims and criminals. It is on record that many given to crime repented after listening to these sermons. The same may be said regarding the positive influence exercised by Khawājah Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī in India. The spread of Islam in India owes much to his teachings.

Conversely, Satan is consistently engaged in wielding his evil influence on man. Many men and women are swayed by his temptations. They are enticed and incited by him in a number of ways. So doing, they abase and degrade themselves. The Qur'ānic account is too graphic to be adequately translated, so suffice to say that it explains how man succumbs to Satan's temptations.

5. The materialistic view of success

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ أَىُّ ٱلْفَرِيقَيْنِ
خَيْرٌ مَّقَامًا وَأَحْسَنُ نَدِيًّا ﴿٧٣﴾ وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُم مِّن قَرْنٍ هُمْ أَحْسَنُ
أَثَٰثًا وَرِءْيًا ﴿٧٤﴾

When Our clear signs are rehearsed to them, the unbelievers ask the believers: "Which of the two sides is better in point of position? Which makes the better show in council?" And how many a generation We have destroyed before them, who were even better in position and outward appearance.

(*Maryam* 19:73-74)

The above passage contains both glad tidings and lessons. It is of much comfort and consolation for man. For Allah states that when His clear signs are rehearsed, the unbelievers spring into action, taunting the believers. They ask the latter to speak frankly about who among the two groups enjoys more comfort and luxury. They think they are much better placed in terms of worldly position and authority, for they have a far greater quantity of material goods. Since they are so well placed in this world, in comparison to the indigent believers, they cannot buy the story that their fortune will change altogether in the Next world. Let us clarify here that in the early days of Islam when this Qur'ānic passage was revealed, the Muslims were markedly poorer than the unbelievers who raked in affluence and authority. It was hard therefore for the latter to reconcile themselves to the fact that the believers would enjoy life in palaces in the Hereafter and that they were doomed for Hellfire.

Their stance was grossly materialistic. It reminds one of the parable recounted in *Sūrah al-Kahf* of the person who was blessed with two gardens, with a river flowing therein and an abundant supply of produce. He too, maintained that he would enjoy the best in the Next world. This is indicative of human weakness, for just as he considers himself blessed with divine bounty, via wealth or authority, he takes it for granted that he will continue to enjoy the same for ever, and that even in the event of a change, he will be even better placed. The unbelievers drew attention to their affluence, palaces and luxurious lifestyles. They boasted equally of their political power and authority. To them, the believers were not destined for any good. For they were a weak, poor lot, lacking proper food, clothing or shelter. They did not anticipate any change of fortune with regard to themselves or the believers. It was beyond their comprehension that they could be deprived of everything in the Next Life.

In asserting their stance the unbelievers failed to realise that conditions change as man is transported from this world to the Next. An entirely different set of parameters come into force in the Hereafter. We know how one earns wealth in this world. By dint of

one's knowledge and skills one may obtain wealth here, which may help one lead a life of ease. However, other criteria are enforced in the Next Life.

One's beliefs are the deciding factor in the Hereafter. Good deeds are the other main criterion there. It will be ascertained as to whether one has performed good deeds to earn Allah's pleasure. In essence, then, it is obvious that the parameters will be changed. For even in this world, conditions vary from one country to another. The standards observed in Asia are different from the ones followed in the USA. We have different modes of making money and in lifestyle. The rich are treated differently in one country than another. Some turn rich overnight as they lay their hands on treasure. Some are fortunate enough to receive huge sums of money in inheritance. In the West one's merit and skills, nonetheless, account mainly for one's financial status.

Since it is a truism that conditions and criteria change from place to place, there is no reason why another set of standards will not be followed in the Hereafter. It perhaps amounts to stating the obvious that in the Hereafter, sound faith, good deeds, Allah's pleasure, obedience to His messenger and observance of religious duties will be the essential criteria.

Those with a shallow outlook, however, insist that they will continue to enjoy good fortune even in the Next Life. They are altogether too complacent and boastful about their present status. Allah rejects this line of thinking. He has devised a particular set of norms for this life. Those who work hard are bound to have a comfortable life. Similarly, the skilled are more likely to obtain wealth.

However, all this will carry no weight in the Next Life. The unbelievers might suffer from the delusion that they are engaged here in something good and useful. However, their pursuits will be reduced to naught in the Next Life, for these were grossly this-worldly. One's affluence here will be of no avail there.

To bring home this truth more clearly Allah cites a concrete example. The unbelievers emphasise their better position and outward

appearance. Allah, however, asks them to study the fate of earlier communities, something which should be easily evident to them. Not long ago these communities once flourished, yet still perished by Allah's command. Many races, nations and towns were destroyed in an instant that excelled even these unbelievers in their worldly provisions, possessions and standard of living. Allah destroyed them notwithstanding their affluence. Their wealth did not save them. Since such is the case, the unbelievers should not entertain any false hope that their wealth will avail them in the Hereafter. Earlier communities took great pride in their possessions – equipment, furniture, the size of their houses, etc. They were very particular about their high standard of living.

Allah reiterates their provisions. The immediate addressees of the Qur'ān realised well the importance of these provisions, for they were nomadic people and knew how significant one's possessions are for leading a comfortable life. These Arabs had hazy ideas about worldly goods. For their own lifestyle was too frugal and simple. Their food was not elaborate. The same was true of their houses. Their culture was in its infancy. Their perception of provisions was narrow and limited. However, the important Qur'ānic message is that earlier communities were destroyed, notwithstanding their affluence. Their provisions were of no avail to them. They lost all that they had in no time at all. Divine punishment put an end to everything they once enjoyed.

The Qur'ān dismisses with contempt the materialistic mindset of the unbelievers. For their only interest lies in selfish gain and seeking pleasure. The Qur'ān rejects such an outlook on life, though those with a narrow view of life attach much importance to worldly success. For believers, however, only the criteria laid down by faith must be followed.

6. Muslims and obscenity

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَن تَشِيعَ ٱلْفَٰحِشَةُ فِى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Those who love to see obscenity spread among the believers, will have a grievous penalty in this life and in the Hereafter. Allah knows while you do not know.

(*al-Nūr* 24:19)

This verse carries a miraculous note, for it was revealed in Madīnah in a particular context. A certain event had happened which was rapidly gaining currency. The Qur'ān disregards such insignificant points as the number of people involved in such events and their interrelationships. Its critique is universal, far beyond the narrow historical and geographical limits of any particular event. Its message is as valid now as it was at the time of its initial revelation.

As for those who love to spread obscenity among the unbelievers, it may suffice for us to cast a quick glance over today's journalism, television, radio, popular fiction, cinema and outlook on life. Such an abysmal depth of moral depravity was once unimaginable. The Madīnan Muslims took the verse quoted above at its face value and believed in it. They could not foresee the present level of obscenity that pervades society.

It goes without saying that the forces of moral disorder and anarchy are equipped with an amazingly rich range of resources. They are capable of accomplishing anything and may project falsehood and evil as truth.

The same is true of the evil influence exercised by political, social and financial bodies working amid us. Europeans, Americans and Communists who nurture a false and tendentious view of life, who cause and spread corruption, whose morals are depraved and who cling to a false set of notions represent a powerful, highly organised

entity. They impose their evil views on other nations. Presently they enjoy ascendancy and hegemony. They are further reinforced by a media which loves to spread obscenity among believers.



[XI]
Divine Laws

1. The lasting nature of good

فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً وَأَمَّا مَا يَنفَعُ النَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ ﴿١٧﴾

Scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on earth. Thus does Allah set forth parables.

(*al-Raʿd* 13:17)

The above verse underscores the workings of the universe. We learn from both the Qur'ān and history that whatever is good has an enduring quality. This is an altogether different notion from the survival of the fittest that has gained much popularity in our times. The Qur'ān, however, projects the principle of the lasting nature of good, as is evident from the verse above.

Whatever is not good or positive or useful and which does not contribute to man's survival or comfort or progress is branded as "scum" by the Qur'ān. As a comprehensive, wide-ranging term this refers to something which is devoid of substance. It lacks stability

and constancy. At most, it signifies a sudden, powerful movement which does not have any permanent form. Scum appears at the top, comprising dirt and impurity. It is not of any benefit for mankind. Either it disappears while floating on the top or is relegated to the sides. In either case it does not last. It does not have the capacity for survival.

Allah's law entails that evil or scum cannot flourish for long. Were scum to last, it would pose a danger to the existence of all creatures in the world. By contrast to it is that which benefits mankind and that which lasts on earth.

Many earlier communities have perished, though some have survived. Muslims were, no doubt, defeated by the Tartars. However, since the former represented the category which is beneficial to mankind, which had a life-giving message and constituted a formidable force, the latter had to relent. The Muslims may have lost the battle, yet their invaluable message made the Tartars submissive to them. This is the law of nature whereby something beneficial lasts. For only it ensures life.

This truth is reiterated in the above-quoted Qur'ānic verse whereby scum disappears but something beneficial has a lasting nature. If Muslims prove themselves as beneficial for their society, they will justify their presence. So doing, they will appear as indispensable. In that eventually they cannot be uprooted by tyranny. Muslims will remain unaffected by their surroundings. Having displayed their mettle, they will be held in high esteem by everyone. Allah has guaranteed the presence and existence of those who are valuable for the cause of true faith. This explains why the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) petitioned Allah that the destruction of Muslims in a battle would bring an end to the spread of the message of His Oneness. Without Muslims, life on earth will lose its meaning and sense of direction. Or at least, it will create a huge gap which will not be filled by anyone.

2. Divine judgement about mankind

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُنَزِّلُ ٱلْغَيْثَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا قَنَطُوا۟ وَيَنشُرُ رَحْمَتَهُۥ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْوَلِىُّ ٱلْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٨﴾

Allah is the One Who sends down rain after men have given up all hope, and scatters His mercy far and wide. He is the Protector, Worthy of all praise.

(*al-Shūrā* 42:28)

This Qur'ānic verse embodies immeasurable guidance for everyone. The "rain" in the verse may also be taken to mean anything that rescues one and provides one with help in a crisis. It is Allah alone Who comes to man's rescue as he faces problems. Again, it is He Who lends man a supporting hand. As a dying person is revived when a drop of elixir is given him, Allah provides solace to the scorching earth by blessing it with rainfall. Allah responds to man's petition. At a time when everyone, including the high and the mighty, had despaired of rain, Allah sends down rain which revives the dead land. Thus He showers His mercy. For He alone is man's protector Who deserves all praise.

The divine attributes mentioned in this context appear to be very carefully chosen. All of His names are excellent. His is the best example. Reference is made, nonetheless, to two of His attributes – Protector and Worthy of all praise, for these are directly linked with rescuing humanity and with truth. Allah is the Protector of humanity. No owner would like to see his field as barren. As mankind's Protector, Allah ensures its revival. In equal measure, Allah is deserving of all praise. It does not befit His mercy and majesty to abandon humanity.

3. A tenfold reward for good acts

مَن جَآءَ بِٱلْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُۥ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا ۖ وَمَن جَآءَ بِٱلسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَىٰٓ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

He who does good shall have ten times as much to his credit; he who does evil shall only be recompensed according to his evil. No wrong shall be done unto any of them.

(*al-Anʿām* 6:160)

Contained in the above passage is a great glad tiding. For Allah promises a tenfold reward to those who do good. Conversely, those guilty of a sin will be recompensed only in proportion to their wrongdoing. They will not be punished beyond this.

Generally speaking, in this world one is rewarded equivalent to one's good works. One is given something in view of the quantum of one's work. By the same token, one is punished for one's crimes. The standard of reward and punishment is equal is our perception. The same law applies to everyone, whether they do good or evil. This principle is universal in that it permeates all the codes in force.

Allah's law is, however, markedly different. His reward for a good deed is tenfold whereas He recompenses an evil deed in equal measure. This reflects His overflowing mercy and His great blessing to weak and mortal man. This in itself makes huge allowances for man's propensity to commit sin. Were Allah to punish man tenfold for his misdeeds, man's fate would have been doomed long ago. For man commits more sins than he does good. Out of His immense grace, however, Allah has devised different norms for good and evil deeds.

Allah promises man that no wrong will be done to him. Otherwise, man would have perished altogether under divine wrath. As the Creator, Benefactor and Guide, Allah is, no doubt, incensed at man's misdeeds. It is natural for a benefactor to be upset, if one brought up

by him with love and affection then turns hostile. Yet Allah assures man that He will do no wrong to His servant.

Allah performs this great favour to man in the face of the undeniable truth that it is He Who has brought man into being out of nothing and blessed him with all faculties – physical, mental and spiritual. Yet man disobeys Him. Notwithstanding this provocation, Allah does not punish man instantly, tearing him into pieces, which would rule out any further disobedience on man's part once and for all. Allah is within His right to mete out exemplary punishment to erring man, yet He comforts man in telling him that he will not be wronged.

4. The key to success

لَّيْسَ بِأَمَانِيِّكُمْ وَلَآ أَمَانِيِّ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ۗ مَن يَعْمَلْ سُوٓءًا يُجْزَ بِهِۦ ... ﴿١٢٣﴾

Not your desires, nor of the People of the Book can prevail. Whoever works evil will be punished accordingly.

(*al-Nisā'* 4:123)

Desire is innate in human nature. Since the beginning of man's life on earth, man has been swayed by his desires. Ground realities have, however, always been at variance with man's desires. Divine laws and reason vindicate ground realities. Allah decides the fate of communities with an eye to their conduct, not with reference to their whims. The Qur'ān draws a sharp distinction between desires and reality. One may intensely want to have something which may be legitimate in its own right in terms of the *Sharī'ah*, reason and morality. However, divine judgement is not dictated by such desire.

The Qur'ān categorically rules out any partisanship. For in the verse above it is asserted that Allah does not take into consideration anyone's wishes. A pointed reference is made to false, whimsical

notions entertained by the People of the Book. This address is also directed at the Prophet's Companions, including those who had participated in the Battle of Badr and the Ḥudaybiyyah Treaty. Among them were such noble souls who had been promised entry into Paradise in their own lifetime. They are told curtly that their wishes will not tilt the balance in their favour.

Divine law is absolutely clear: one will be adjudged solely on the basis of one's deeds. Whoever does evil will suffer punishment. This applies not only to the Hereafter, for in this world too the same holds true. Divine law is such that one will face the consequences of one's deeds.

The principle of the survival of the fittest is widely acclaimed, particularly in Europe. One may also find its vindication in scripture. However, the Qur'ān goes beyond this commonplace rule. The Qur'ānic stance is cognate with religious sensibility, for it lays down the norm that whatever is beneficial for mankind is bound to last: *Scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on earth.* (*al-Raʿd* 13:17)

The wisdom underlying the Qur'ānic norm is that it is hard to decide as to what should survive among the fittest. For being fit is a relative term, and many things may be equally fit and fitting. As these are essential in equal measure, one cannot think of any court or jury capable of passing judgement on this issue. In contrast, man can easily determine what is beneficial for him and what is not.

It is easier to determine at any point in time, whether it be in our own period of advanced knowledge or in primitive conditions, what is of benefit to mankind. Man has an innate capacity to discern this point for himself. In the Qur'ān, which stands out as the Divine Book of guidance for the whole of humanity for all time and place and at all levels, the fallacious notion of the survival of the fittest is replaced by the life-enriching principle of something being beneficial or not for mankind.

Even a child takes no time to decide what is good for him. He knows what will really help him. He holds his parents dear for he

finds them immensely beneficial. So does he also think about his kith and kin. Likewise, he is drawn irresistibly towards those who are intelligent, mature and experienced. A child finds out his benefactor. In opposition to this, the notion of the survival of the fittest provides man with only transitory gain. We should, however, realise that man's wishes often run counter to ground realities. Communities, nations and even individuals have been guilty of placing a premium on their wishes, while disregarding reality.

Vast empires throughout history, including the Roman, Persian, Andalusian, ʿAbbāsid and Khawārizm Shāhī ones committed the same mistake – of not discerning reality and of failing to fulfil the demands of reality. On studying history one realises that their disregard for reality brought about their decline and fall.

5. Pious souls command love and respect

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ وُدًّا ﴿٩٦﴾

Allah the Most Gracious bestows love on those who believe and do good.

(*Maryam* 19:96)

Allah the Most Gracious evokes everyone's love for believers who are engaged in good deeds. It is significant that the divine attribute of "grace" is especially mentioned in this context. For it represents His mercy and grace. Allah infuses our love for such pious souls. Some Qur'ānic scholars interpret this verse in a general sense, taking it to mean that Allah loves such noble souls. However, its correct interpretation is that Allah infuses love for them into the general public. An authentic *ḥadīth*, recorded by both Bukhārī and Muslim, states that when Allah loves one of His servants, He tells Gabriel: "I love this servant of Mine. You should also love him." The latter passes on this message to other angels stationed at various heavens.

So much so that love for this person permeates even the fish in the water and the ants in their colonies.

We have witnessed first hand how Allah showers His grace on His pious servants. They are loved in all the corners of the world. Men are captivated by them. Such a phenomenon is consistent and may be observed by anyone at any time.

We have had the privilege of enjoying the company of some saints, both in India and the Arab world. It seems that love for them is promoted on a wide scale and in an organised manner. People appear to be intoxicated with love and respect for them. All this happens without drawing any attention to the intent. No one in particular is seen promoting or sponsoring them. Love for them flows naturally and instantly. It may be likened to an ambience or climate which affects one unconsciously. The more pious a person is, the greater love and respect he commands.

We have been fortunate enough to meet some saints. In the then undivided India, Mawlānā Aḥmad ʿAlī of Lahore was held in much esteem by the élites of the day. They appeared before the Mawlānā with great deference. The Mawlānā was adept at public speaking. Once he delivered the following speech: "Over the years I have been in Lahore [a major town in Pakistan] I have yet to meet true believers. You (O people) are blessed with everything. However, there are few true believers among you."

Notwithstanding his harsh words, people flocked to him and flourished under his spell.

In India I shared the blessed company of my mentor, Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Qādir Raipūrī who was widely respected not only in the Indian subcontinent but also in Saudi Arabia. The same holds true of Mawlānā Ilyās, the founder of Tablīghī Jamāʿat. He earned huge acclaim, though he never resorted to publicity. Mawlānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, and Mawlānā Ashraf ʿAlī Thānwī also enjoyed love and respect on an impressive scale. All of them attracted followers and well-wishers, including contemporary scholars. People attended them sincerely and selflessly, and waited for hours only in order to

catch a glimpse of them. The élites waited on them and listened with rapt attention to their utterances.

All this owes its origin to divine dispensation, as spelled out in the above verse whereby Allah infuses love and respect for noble souls. They enjoy their exalted position as they are blessed with Allah's grace and mercy.

There is a variety of love which has nothing to do with mercy. At times people tend to express their love, though this might be inconvenient for their spiritual master. Out of their overflowing love for them, people try to please them, though this actually hurts them. However, Allah produces such love for them which is tinged with His mercy. As a result, these noble souls do not face any inconvenience at the hands of their followers.

The Qur'ān speaks of a special kind of love in this context, one which is hard to adequately translate. Nor can one measure the degree of such love. It goes without saying that love takes many different forms – as of physicians for their patients, of parents and of teachers and mentors. Allah evokes such love for these pious souls which is best suited to them.

6. Manifestations of man's striving

وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنسَٰنِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُۥ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾ ثُمَّ يُجْزَىٰهُ
ٱلْجَزَآءَ ٱلْأَوْفَىٰ ﴿٤١﴾

Man can have nothing but what he strives for. The fruit of his striving will soon come into sight. Then he will be rewarded with a full recompense.

(*al-Najm* 53:39-41)

The above verses boost the morale of not only Muslims but of all mankind, provided they have a clear view of life and champion a sound cause. For all committed people the above passage carries

an inspiring message. It is specially relevant for institutions engaged in training younger generations, for it contains an elaborate moral code and set of guidelines for the young.

Allah has promised man that he will obtain success in his striving. It is emphasised in the Qur'ān that man's efforts will bear fruit. As to the time-scale of gathering the fruit of one's striving, the Qur'ān hints that this may take a very long time. Man is thus told not to despair if he does not gain immediate results. Man is to be credited for much in the world – the vast empires, the rise of various civilisations, the spread and advancement of knowledge, and intellectuals appearing on the public scene. All these are manifestations of man's striving. These also stand out as illustrations of the Qur'ānic promise that man will be recompensed for his efforts.

It is the duty of the Muslim community to ensure its identity. The Qur'ānic directive on this count is not addressed to individuals. Rather, the entire community is instructed that it will earn what it works for. Man gets his portion in this life and the Next in relation to what he strives for. He is destined to reap the fruits of his work. Allah has preordained this law that man is to be recompensed in equivalent measure for his efforts. Man's success is contingent on his attempt. He is bound to get the fruits of his labour. The outcome of his work will be evident to everyone.

Allah promises man that he will be recompensed in full for his striving. This is to assure that one's efforts do not go to waste. As reward is promised, this acts as an incentive for man. For he knows that his efforts will surely produce results, sooner or later. Furthermore, Allah's promise is that one will be rewarded over and above what one deserves. One may even get much more than what one strove for. This constitutes a major glad tiding for mankind, one which is amply borne out by history and the accounts of religious and reform movements. One notes the same manifestations in the history of literature, joint business ventures, research studies and other domains of human activity. Often does He reward amply for his efforts. Taken in this sense, the verse constitutes another glad tiding.

Let us then realise this truth that we will be repaid in full for our work and in a measure beyond our expectations. We need not wait for huge resources or favourable conditions for launching our ventures. For example, family connections, advanced educational qualifications, a vast library, etc. are not essential to achieving success. What is, nonetheless, essential is the sincerity of our purpose. We must strive honestly and earnestly. If we do so, we are bound to reap rich dividends.

Hard work combined with good intention and excellent morals is the key to success. Allah being Omnipotent and the Knower of the Unseen declares that one will be recompensed in full. Allah represents absolute truth and He is the Lord of the universe as well. In this capacity this declaration assumes greater significance. In the face of this unmistakable promise, one need not worry about the outcome of one's work.

The above Qur'ānic verse is life-sustaining and a source of immense hope and joy for mankind of all time and place. For it assures man of the good result of his deeds. The verse may also be taken as a moral code as well, for it covers all aspects of life. It instructs us on how we should lead life and what we should do. We learn that faith should govern our lives. We should strive for reform around us and strengthen our faith. We should remain confident and cool about the results of our striving. It is only natural for man to think about the gains which he receives for doing something. Man is curious by nature. He tries to find out for example, the effect of a medicine, constituents of a seed and the prerequisites for doing something.

Accordingly, Allah has in this verse set man's mind at peace, instructing him in an entire code of life. If we grasp fully and clearly the import of this verse and believe sincerely in its import, it will be in our own interests. For it represents the promise of Almighty Allah. The assertion of even the most intelligent human being is suspect. One cannot take his word for granted. It is common knowledge that many people make predictions which do not come true. Rather, history abounds in such examples. However, when Allah promises something

it is bound to come true. His Word cannot be wrong. Given this, we must abide by His Word and lead our lives in accordance with His guidance.

This verse contains glad tidings about man's striving, which revives man's spirit. The distinguished Urdu philosopher-poet Dr. Iqbal reiterates the same truth in asserting that man's deeds place him in Paradise or Hell.

7. Knowledge and how it works

وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَن تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِن ظُهُورِهَا وَلَٰكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَىٰ ۚ وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٨٩﴾

It is no virtue if you enter your houses from the back. It is virtue if you fear Allah. Enter houses through proper doors and fear Allah so that you may prosper.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:189)

Those conversant with *tafsīr* literature do not have any difficulty in identifying the contextual background of this verse. It is known to them that during the *jāhiliyyah* period it was customary among Arabs that until the completion of *Ḥajj* rites they did not enter their homes through doors. They did so thinking that until they finally returned from the House of Allah, they should not enter their houses in the normal way. Let us clarify that this was a figment of their imaginations. There was no divine directive to support this whimsical notion. Until the completion of *Ḥajj* they made their way into their houses through the roofs or walls. Worse, they regarded this as an act of great virtue. For them it amounted to paying tribute to the House of Allah. The Qur'ān, however, dispels their misconception, plainly telling them that it is not an act of virtue if they enter their houses from the rear. Rather, they should enter their houses in the normal way.

The Qur'ān upholds and recommends common sense on this count. It is natural to enter a place through its proper entrance. Since the Qur'ān is a complete code of life, encompassing every aspect of life and is directed at every class of people and every phase of life, it instructs man in this basic truth about entering houses. This directive is reflective of the Qur'ānic stance on life as a whole. This norm applies not only to the entrance to domiciles but also to all aspects of life. If one intends to learn the skills of a trade, one should do so in a proper manner. One is expected to learn the trade at the feet of a competent teacher, gain familiarity with the tools and advance one's knowledge step by step. Without thorough grounding in the subject one cannot expect to gain any success. In certain professions a uniform is also essential. An apprentice cannot pick and choose his learning method. Nor is he allowed to criticise the teaching practices employed. One who thinks very highly of his mental abilities and refuses to follow the system does not achieve success, especially at a young age. One rejecting discipline cannot grow into a competent professional. It is therefore, evident why the Qur'ān emphasises the observance of rules in the proper fashion.

This Qur'ānic principle applies to all walks of life. Divine rules are based on human nature and common sense. If one does not follow the laws of nature, one cannot reach one's goal. Take the example of literacy. If one does not begin one's study by learning the alphabet, one will find it very difficult to read or write. One may be a genius yet one cannot learn a language without first mastering its alphabet. If one is provided with all material facilities yet still be ignorant of the alphabet, one cannot study a work in that language, for one is guilty of not having followed the rules of language learning. Very distinguished scholars also had to gain knowledge in this same standard way of learning things gradually. At an advanced stage they were then able to author original works. Had they not learnt things in a proper way, however, they could not have reached the heights they enjoy presently. There are norms governing each field of study, which must be observed. There is much common to secular and

religious knowledge. Both of these are pursued in a systematic and organised manner. In both, respect for one's teachers is held as a great virtue.

Notwithstanding some common features, the two streams become distinct from each other at a certain level. For example, in religious knowledge, the following concerns are of primary importance: knowledge is sought only to gain Allah's pleasure; it is marked by sincerity and the realisation that notwithstanding one's own effort, knowledge is bestowed only by Allah.

It is not out of place to cite in this context Imām Shāfi'ī's account: "I complained to my teacher about my poor memory. To this he replied: Shun sin, for knowledge represents Allah's light, which is not granted to those disobedient of Him." This is the line of demarcation between secular and religious knowledge. It is not some ordinary, mundane branch of knowledge, which is marred by lack of esteem for one's teacher. One pursuing it cannot and does not rely only on one's own mental abilities. One does not think that one will master knowledge as long as one is blessed with good memory, sound health and material resources. One does not boast of one's own potential. Rather, students with an apparently low mental calibre can do very well. Some have even won wide acclaim. I recall here a teacher at Lahore College. His accomplishments were widely recognised, even by Dr. Iqbal, yet he did not keep himself steadily on the path of religion. He did not, for example, contribute to the spread of Islamic sciences and *Sunnah*. Nor did he train those around him spiritually. He even spoke rather disdainfully of Mawlānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, mocking his religiosity.

Likewise, someone scoffed at Mawlānā Ilyās's devotion to Prayer. However, it goes without saying that Mawlānā Ilyās's mission has created ripples throughout all parts of the world. His message has been greeted even in the USA and the remote regions of Africa.

By following the Qur'ānic principle of doing things properly one can emulate their hard work and their capacity for study. Knowledge should be coupled with one's commitment to the *Sunnah*, revulsion

towards innovations in matters of faith and sin, and devotion to Allah. All this confers divine light.

ʿAllāmah Bayṭār of Syria is on record, recalling: "Once we could not visit our teacher as it was intensely cold. There was a heavy snowfall that evening, which prevented us from visiting our teacher. He interrogated us the next day and as we told him that extreme cold was the cause of our absence, he poured a pot full of chilled water over us, saying that it would make us really realise what cold is. We put up with his punishment. We never however gave him another chance to chide us." Such an attitude helped ʿAllāmah Bayṭār grow into such a distinguished personality.

During the golden period of Islamic civilisation it was the norm for students to serve their teachers in a variety of ways. In return, they benefited immensely from their mentors. Apart from being teachers, they also performed the role of spiritual masters. Students observed them closely, for example, their prayers, their degree of devotion during prayer, their observance of the *Sunnah*, and their general behaviour in the mosque. In sum, they learnt much from their teachers. This glorious tradition however is on the decline.

Regarding the pursuit of knowledge one should strictly follow the Qur'ānic standard of exploring it properly, observe all of its norms, work hard and devote oneself fully to one's studies. If one keeps these points in mind, one will be helped greatly by Allah's law, as has been the case down the ages.

8. The order of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs

وَٱلشَّمْسُ تَجْرِى لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَّهَا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْعَلِيمِ ﴿٣٨﴾

And the sun runs its course for a period determined for it. That is the decree of Allah, the exalted in might, the All-Knowing.
(*Yā Sīn* 36:38)

Allah has ordained the course of the sun. It moves consistently towards the points of its rising and setting. This law was put in place by Allah, Lord of the universe Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. Little wonder then that He has been able to devise and enforce it. If one is mighty, it does not necessarily mean that a system one develops is perfectly in order. Likewise, it may be devoid of underlying wisdom. If one does not possess absolute knowledge, the system will run into trouble. By the same token, if one does not enjoy the power to enforce it, the system will not come into force.

The above verse speaks pointedly of the solar system, specifying that the sun moves by Allah's will from a particular point to reach another preordained point. Its course is run, owing to Allah's power and knowledge. The above may stand also for the institution of Prophethood, true faith and the call to faith and their interrelationship. Everything in the above sphere, as in the solar system, is preordained and perfectly well organised. Nothing is left to chance. Moreover, both are characterised by an unmistakable rationale. Everything is in accord with Allah's will and command. His wisdom is all-pervasive. The system is wholly dependent upon His will.

Let us take a look at the Prophet's successors known popularly as the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. They came to centre stage after the Prophet Muḥammad's demise and were appointed Caliphs in a particular order. Allah provided each of them with an opportunity to perform this role. This course of events was determined by Almighty and All-Knowing Allah. The whole system worked with cohesion. This demonstrates how perfect is divine mercy, wisdom and authority.

It emerges from a study of the history of various faith communities that the defence and maintenance of faith is of paramount importance. The protection of faith is the key to its success and spread. The bearer of divine faith occupies pride of place. His successors ensure the preservation and spread of faith. The latter reject attempts to tamper with the divine arrangement. This is their first and foremost duty. Hence, the fate of a faith depends very much on the selection of disciples, for they help preserve faith in its original form. As a result its teachings continue to flourish.

Apart from firm faith, the gnosis of Allah and unadulterated monotheism, another very important prerequisite for the survival of faith is its adherents' keen sensitivity to the preservation of their faith. The Prophet's successor should have this outstanding quality. He should be extremely particular about the identity of faith.

Again, one learns from the history of world religions that corruption crept into these as they were not fortunate enough to have trustworthy custodians of faith. Hence these religions changed beyond all recognition as there was no one to oversee their preservation. May Allah shower His blessings upon Abū Bakr, the Prophet's successor and the first Caliph who was very keen to keep Islam secure to its original source. Abū Bakr's numerous qualities, especially his commitment to justice and piety, his proximity to Allah, his altruism and his perfection are graphically recorded in works on *Sīrah* and *Ḥadīth*.

Nonetheless, his outstanding quality, which was then needed most, was his exceptional attachment to the cause of preserving Islam as it was bequeathed by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). He ensured that the Muslim community did not deviate an inch from the Prophet's way. Undauntingly, he resolved to follow in the Prophet's footsteps. His commitment to this objective may be described as his special trait. As a result, Muslims are seen to this day practising the same religious duties which were prescribed by the *Sharī'ah* at the outset and as promulgated by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). In this way, Islam has been safe to a large extent from accretions and tamperings. All this is a result of Abū Bakr's special efforts on this count. We stand indebted to the first Caliph for following our faith in its pristine purity. He met a pressing need of the day in confronting this challenge. His saying on this issue is reflective of the depths of his devotion to the cause and his unwavering faith. He is, for example, on record as declaring: "Can there be any alteration in faith while I am alive? Can anyone dare tamper with the faith prescribed by Allah?" Abū Bakr possessed this quality of preservation which is essential for the survival of a faith.

Besides preserving faith, it was also necessary that Muslims be made to adhere to their Islamic faith. Equally important was the

constancy and consistency on the part of those who were to serve as role models for subsequent generations of Muslims. Muslims were to emulate their exemplary character and conduct.

During ʿUmar's reign, parts of the Roman and Persian empires, and Egypt and Syria were subdued. Fabulous wealth thus accrued to the Muslims and rich tributes were paid to the Islamic State in Madīnah. Muslims came across such luxury which was beyond their imaginations. Yet would such sudden affluence misguide Muslims to the path of pleasure seeking and materialism?

At this juncture Allah arranged for ʿUmar to become Caliph as he held very strong views about the Arabs' identity and distinctive features. He saw to it that the Muslim masses did not fall prey to materialism. He controlled the spread of affluence and luxury and urged the Arabs to maintain the main traits of their character and conduct – piety, hard work, simplicity, horse riding, contentment and military skills.

After ʿUmar's era, things were well under control. Apostasy and tampering with the articles of faith were ruled out once and for all. The Islamic values of human equality and justice were manifest. It was fairly evident that the Islamic state would ensure the goodness of everyone. It was anticipated that people would enter the fold of Islam in large numbers. The emergence of illustrious figures in all fields of study was imminent. Needless to add, such towering figures appeared in the field of *Ḥadīth* studies as Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, Shāfiʿī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. To this galaxy of first-rate scholars also belong Imām Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad and such eminent military generals and conquerors as ʿUqbah ibn Nāfiʿ, Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād and Muḥammad ibn Qāsim.

Later on, Allah's choice for Caliph fell on ʿUthmān as his tribe had gained fame in state craft and military conquest. It is only natural after all that ties of kinship consolidate a state, for members of the same ruling tribe take state craft as their own and act with the utmost sincerity. In sum, a Caliph of ʿUthmān's standing was needed at that time. History records a large number of conquests during his reign. We know that Cyprus, huge chunks of Africa, Central Asia, and Persia fell to Muslims.

By ʿUthmān's day Islam was deeply entrenched in security. There was no force to pose a threat to its political, military and administrative order. Muslims had now been ruling over vast empires for a long time, which in turn had left its mark on cultural life. New political strategies were also employed, and Muslims became familiar with the political order and values, which governed their policies. Nonetheless, they needed a mentor to instruct them in the demands of both their state and their faith.

At this juncture the fourth Caliph, ʿAlī appeared on the scene. His excellence lay in the primacy he accorded to the dictates of faith over political interests and motives. He displayed such firmness on this issue that the Muslims themselves became more concerned about their faith, even if this entailed loss of political power. In essence, ʿAlī made no allowance for political gain, if this compromised any religious principle.

He left behind a role model demonstrating how to adhere to the basic articles of faith even in the face of civil war and severe opposition from fellow Muslims. He withstood all internal pressures and ensured that faith enjoyed supremacy over politics and diplomacy. Imām Abū Ḥanīfah brought home the insightful point that without ʿAlī's example, we could not have gained any guidance on how to deal with internal opposition and disorder.

In sum, ʿAlī's qualities were the need of the hour. Allah thus helped the Caliphate system. It represents His Might and Omniscience. Not only has Allah ordained the course of the sun, rising in the east and setting in the west, He has also devised various phases for the institution of Prophethood and divine guidance. After passing through several and different stages faith is then completed. Allah provided the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) with worthy successors. All this is reflective of the truth that Allah is Almighty and All-Knowing.

[XII]
Lessons from the Qur'ān

1. The distinction between Islam and *jāhiliyyah*

وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِۦٓ إِخْوَٰنًا وَكُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

And remember with gratitude Islam and jāhiliyyah upon you. For you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love so that by His grace you became brethren. You were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it.

(*Āl ʿImrān* 3:103)

Contained in the above pithy passage is the contrast between Islam and *jāhiliyyah*. The two stand poles apart, as is reiterated in the following passage as well: "*To one who was dead We gave life and a light with which he can walk among men.*" (*al-Anʿām* 6:122) This portrays a graphic picture of both Islam and *jāhiliyyah*, capturing

their respective features and points of departure. The entire history of both Islam and *jāhiliyyah* represents the elaboration of the truth enunciated in the above verse. *Jāhiliyyah* refers to the state of enmity which drives men to the brink of the pit of Fire. In contrast to it, Islam signifies fraternity which helps men avoid the pit of Fire. Even in the most advanced period *jāhiliyyah* produces men who, in Qur'ānic parlance, are like dead bodies. In comparison, Islam grants men new life and such guidance which helps them lead their lives properly and purposefully.

Allah states this truth in simple, plain language. He stresses that one given to disbelief is like he who is dead. On receiving divine guidance however he finds life in the real sense. More importantly, faith like light guides him at every step in life. Such a person on guidance is certainly different from he who is wretched, lost in darkness and unable to find his way out.

2. Shunning *jāhiliyyah*

أَفَحُكْمَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ ۚ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Do they seek after a judgement of the days of jāhiliyyah? For the believers, who can give a better judgement than Allah?
(*al-Mā'idah* 5:50)

The unbelievers are reproached for demanding a judgement which reflects *jāhiliyyah*. The choice of the expression "judgement" in this context is very significant. Implicit in it is the idea of one's preference for something. Allah pointedly asks the unbelievers whether they prefer such a judgement. Do they want to lead their lives in a way which is vitiated by *jāhiliyyah* practices? However, for the believers Allah is the best judge.

This passage brings into sharp relief the distinction between Islam and *jāhiliyyah*. It is a pity that even many Muslims have become

oblivious of this important distinction. They think the era of *jāhiliyyah* is over, associating it with pre-Islamic Arabia. For them there is no longer battle between the two and that it is hence a waste of time and energy to think about *jāhiliyyah* any more. However, the main malaise of the Muslim community is on account of their having disregarded the distinction between the two – between Islam and *jāhiliyyah*.

Jāhiliyyah today is frequently interpreted in its narrow pre-Islamic Arabia context, especially in relation to the then prevalent idolatry, girl infanticide, drinking and highway robbery. However, *jāhiliyyah* is not generally associated with our current way of life, our economy, the norms of everyday living and our likes and dislikes. Yet *jāhiliyyah* actually permeates all the above entities. *Jāhiliyyah* signifies a mindset that is not governed by the guidance imparted by Allah's Messenger. It is not specific to any particular place, say Europe or India or Arabia. It represents a way of life without restriction. In its spirit *jāhiliyyah* is diametrically opposed to Islam, for it totally disregards divine faith, Scripture and Allah's directives. Whoever leads life without the guidance and light provided by Allah's Messenger may be taken as one under the influence of *jāhiliyyah*. Anyone who insists on following the customs and practices current at the time, without reference to divine guidance, betrays the influence of *jāhiliyyah*. The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* incidentally disapprove of any way of life which is not rooted in divine guidance.

On studying *Ḥadīth* it emerges that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) rejected certain things because these smacked of *jāhiliyyah*, even though they were not related to faith. For example, regarding one of his Companions, who did not treat his servant well, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Traces of *jāhiliyyah* are still found in you." He took exception to his bad treatment of the servant. On another occasion he denounced *jāhiliyyah* in strong terms. He urged his Companions to deal harshly with those who invite others to the way of *jāhiliyyah*, thus invoking it. He insisted that *jāhiliyyah* not be condemned in a mild way, rather, it should be dismissed outright. Every Muslim is supposed to reject

strongly any move towards *jāhiliyyah*. He should not even be shy of using harsh language against it. If any *jāhiliyyah* practice is praised, a Muslim should condemn it. Let us clarify that this directive to deal harshly with all forms of *jāhiliyyah* comes from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who was always a mercy unto everyone. Yet here we encounter him prescribing a stern response to *jāhiliyyah*. This then is indicative of the revulsion which Allah and His Messenger have towards *jāhiliyyah*.

It is also worth noting that at the time of the Prophet's advent, numerous vices were rife in Arabia. Of these, mention may be made of idolatry, oppression, highway robbery and the burial of girls alive. In view of these rampant vices this society or period is branded by the Qur'ān as *jāhiliyyah*. Allah has employed this patently repulsive term to serve as a warning for Muslims against it. *Jāhiliyyah, per se*, is indicative of the presence of numerous grave sins and vices. On many occasions the Qur'ān employs this expression, asking Muslims to shun it altogether. Take the following as examples: *[O women!] Do not make a dazzling display as in the days of jāhiliyyah?* (*al-Fatḥ* 33:33) *When the unbelievers had put in their hearts a zeal, zeal of the days of jāhiliyyah.* (*al-Fatḥ* 48:26) *Do they seek after the judgement of the days of jāhiliyyah?* (*al-Mā'idah* 5:50)

We should not take lightly the choice of expressions used by the Qur'ān. If one develops this sense of appreciating the nuances of its words, one can better grasp the meaning of its text. For the careful choice of words helps represent a complete picture. A good writer is always capable of using an apt word for his intended meaning. With his dexterous use of words he evokes feelings of contempt and glory, and of love and hate for someone.

It goes without saying that Allah is the Creator and Originator of all language. It is He Who enables a literary artist to compose anything. He has employed *jāhiliyyah* as something to be shunned and dreaded. Man is asked to be on his guard against it. Allah's penalty is imminent in the *jāhiliyyah* period. Out of His mercy and grace towards mankind Allah put an end to *jāhiliyyah* times by sending down His

beloved Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him), to Arabia at that time. Yet the Qur'ān speaks of the then Arabia as teeming with *jāhiliyyah*. The unbelieving Arabs are condemned for their preference for *jāhiliyyah* and for their rejection of Islam and the *Sharīʿah*. It is sarcastically asked whether they prefer *jāhiliyyah* to Islam.

For expressing His disapproval Allah used the expression *jāhiliyyah* in the above context. It is thus clear that it is the most loathsome term employed in Qur'ānic parlance.

If Islam is well established in society, it infuses revulsion towards all the ramifications of disbelief and *jāhiliyyah*, as also towards their ambience and anything associated with these. One should shudder at the very thought of reverting to them under any circumstance. One blessed with true faith would prefer death to indulging in anything that borders on *jāhiliyyah* and disbelief.

The unbelievers are taken to task for their insistence on following the traditions and customs of *jāhiliyyah*. They are censured for making this choice. It is indeed bewildering that they should opt for it, as it is totally unacceptable and untenable.

3. The Qur'ānic warning to the Muslim community

وَلَا تَرْكَنُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ فَتَمَسَّكُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ
مِنْ أَوْلِيَآءَ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

[O Muslims!] Do not incline towards those who do wrong or else the Hellfire will seize you. You do not have any protector other than Allah. Nor shall you be helped.

(*Hūd* 11:113)

The full force of this verse cannot be conveyed in translation. It is simply beyond any translator's ability to capture its essence.

Muslims are asked not to have even the slightest inclination towards wrong doers. Simply put, they should have nothing to do with them, for they have deviated from the straight way and have abandoned God. If Muslims are drawn towards them, Hellfire will overwhelm them too. In which case they will not have any protector, nor will they have any helper. Once they are deprived of divine patronage, they will not find any refuge anywhere.

We tend to think that in Islam things are neatly divided into what is good and evil and what is lawful or unlawful. None the less, there are things which do not fall neatly into either of these two categories. Whilst one may not easily brand some things as unlawful, one has little difficulty ascertaining what Allah likes and dislikes. One's sense of the unlawful can however be developed by studying the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, *Sīrah* and accounts of the Companions. In this way one notes that there are things which are beyond that which is obviously lawful and unlawful. To this domain belong one's lifestyle, appearance, physical traits and ways and means for beautifying and adorning oneself.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) appeared on the scene, making his call to embrace divine faith, he did not only ask people to accept Islam sincerely and give up polytheism and disbelief. Rather, he instructed them in an entire way of life. Muslims were supposed to adhere to all the norms of the Islamic order. They were promised Allah's reward for choosing this Islamic way of life. Furthermore, they were clearly told to refrain from such acts which had led to the punishment of earlier communities. These groups were guilty of refusing to follow Allah's way. As a result, they incurred divine wrath. Muslims are directed to avoid such misconduct.

It is a common misperception that one does not have to be very particular about those points which are not central to faith. For these do not entail disbelief or wickedness. On seeking a decree from a jurisprudent about such an issue, one is bound to receive the reply that these are not directly related to faith, as they do not betray disbelief or polytheism. Yet Muslims should be extremely careful

about such misdeeds which brought down divine punishment upon earlier communities. The unbelievers are the ones who reject the divine bounty of Islam. They are guilty of disregarding divine favour. They are given to their selfish, unbridled desires. Their other crimes are materialism, this-worldliness and lust for power. Even in their appearance they betray their disobedience of Allah. They deny faith and Allah's messengers. Worse, they instruct their younger generations in these errors.

A Muslim who is keen on developing his faith and sincerely seeks Allah's mercy and favour and the Prophet's blessing should be ever conscious of his accountability to Allah. He should realise all along that angels will interrogate him in his grave. Furthermore, he should be cognisant of the grand assembly on the Day of Judgement when he will have to render his account. The articles of faith are clearly stated in the Qur'ān, *Ḥadīth*, and *Sīrah*. One blessed with true conviction should disapprove of non-Muslims, those who are hostile to Islam, those who war against Muslims and those who look down upon the Islamic way of life. Muslims should detest such people.

Obviously religious duties such as prayer, fasting, *Ḥajj* and *zakāh* are extremely important. The same holds true for all articles of faith. At the same time, however, Muslims should abhor the ideals and values of non-Muslims. They should not be misguided by these. Rather, every measure should be taken to shun these. The verse quoted at the opening of this piece directs Muslims not to have any love and respect for an un-Islamic way of life. If we look upon any British, American or European, who appears as representative of his culture, as a civilised person to be emulated, this is nothing short of a serious folly. We know the lifestyle of these non-Muslims: they get up late, take a bath and shave, and after changing their clothing, they go to work. They follow a particular code of life. If Muslims are impressed by their lifestyle, it will afflict, rather weaken their faith.

We urge students of Islamic educational institutions not only to offer prayers and refrain from all that is unlawful and undesirable, but that they also take great pride in the way of life prescribed by the Messenger of Allah and practised by the Prophet's Companions.

4. Gratitude for Islam

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾

And remember your Lord declared: If you are grateful, I will add more favours unto you. But if you show ingratitude, know that My punishment is terrible.

(*Ibrāhīm* 14:7)

Allah places a premium on expressing gratitude. He showers numerous favours on those who show their gratefulness to Him. It must however, be realised that Allah does not stand in need of any thanks. Yet one of His excellent attributes is that He is Appreciative. Man is likely to receive more, if he is grateful. Conversely, he may be denied divine favour, if he acts ungratefully towards Allah.

The message of this verse then is loud and clear; those grateful to Allah are promised more bounties whereas those who are ungrateful are warned against divine punishment. At times, when one notes members of other faith communities enjoying life, one is drawn towards them. Satan strikes at this weak moment, enticing Muslims to indulge in some similar revelry. It goes without saying that many around us are disbelievers, ignorant of the doctrine of monotheism and Islamic teachings. They are given to enjoying life, worshipping even trees, indulging in idolatry and festivities, comprising good food, dance and entertainment. Many earlier communities went astray on this count, falling prey to Satan's promptings. They insisted that they be allowed to enjoy life, without restriction.

Many earlier communities have been guilty of idolatry, elevating their nation-states to godhead. Some have deified their race and language. Others have glorified their ancestors beyond permissible limits. Allah has steered Muslims away from all these false idols. We are directed to take pride in our faith, Islam, and not to be drawn towards anything outside it.

Allah recounted an instructive event from the history of the Israelites, followers of the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him). In this lies an important lesson for Muslims.

Allah had imparted true knowledge regarding Himself to the Israelites through the agency of His Messenger, the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him). He blessed them with the invaluable favour of instructing them in monotheism. He helped them gain faith and realise that no one besides Allah is worthy of worship and that no one other than Him exercises power and authority. However, these Israelites were so foolish and ungrateful that once, while the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) led them to a place, they passed by a community engaged in idolatry. They noted the festive atmosphere there, with well decorated shops, a market thronged with people and members of every age group and class enjoying life. It was a religious festival of idolaters, of which entertainment was the main component. This allured the Israelites and they unabashedly asked the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) to arrange for an idol for them, for they too wanted to enjoy life like these idolaters. They insisted on a palpable, visible idol which would satisfy them. They were drawn irresistibly towards religious festivities, and in turn to the idols associated with them.

This naturally infuriated the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him), who was a monotheist *par excellence*. He branded them as an utterly ignorant people who were ungrateful as well. For he had instructed them for a long time in monotheism. He had led them away from the filth of idolatry and arranged for manna and dew for them by Allah's leave. Yet they were so much carried away by the glitter of this idolatrous festival that they disregarded their faith altogether. Wrathful, he told them: *Certainly these people will be destroyed for that which they are engaged in [idol worship]. And all that they are doing is vain.* (*al-Aʿrāf* 7:139).

He warned them against the horrible consequences of idolatry which would land them in eternal punishment. He took the Israelites to task, for notwithstanding his training of them, they had abandoned

faith on the slightest pretext. They were overwhelmed by the idolaters' festivity. Moses' indignation was perfectly understandable.

Being the messenger of Allah he told them plainly that idolatry would cause their eternal perdition. The intensity of his wrath is worth noting. He also declared that idolatry would come to nought. His response is followed by this counselling: *Shall I seek for you a god other than Allah, while He has given you superiority over mankind?* (*al-Aʿrāf* 7:140).

The Israelites excelled others, for they were the recipients of the message of monotheism. Allah had done them numerous favours and secured their freedom from Pharaoh's shackles. Given this, it was the height of stupidity to ask for a powerless, helpless idol.

This incident is full of lessons. It is related for our own benefit. Let us, it says, construct Islamic society in a way that instinctively and instantly rejects sin and evil. It should find revolting any call which is opposed to the Islamic worldview. Muslims should reject outright a way of life with unbridled desires and passions. They should be proud of their faith, Islam, taking it as their one invaluable asset. They should place a premium on their allegiance to Islam and on all that Islam stands for.

5. Lessons from the story of the people of Saba'

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ ٱلْقُرَى ٱلَّتِى بَـٰرَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرًى ظَـٰهِرَةً وَقَدَّرْنَا فِيهَا
ٱلسَّيْرَ ۖ سِيرُوا۟ فِيهَا لَيَالِىَ وَأَيَّامًا ءَامِنِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَقَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا بَـٰعِدْ بَيْنَ
أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَـٰهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَّقْنَـٰهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ ۚ إِنَّ فِى
ذَٰلِكَ لَـَٔايَـٰتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿١٩﴾

Between them and the cities on which We had poured Our blessings, We had placed cities in prominent positions, and

between them We had appointed stages of a journey in due proportion. "Travel therein secure, by night and by day." But they said: "Our Lord! Place longer distances between our journey stages." But they wronged themselves. At length We made them as a tale, and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments. Certainly in this are signs for one who is patiently constant and grateful.

(*Saba'* 34:18-19)

The Qur'ān relates its accounts of earlier communities, civilisations and destroyed societies with a view to conveying lessons to us. For this purpose, the Qur'ān also employs parables as well, which are especially instructive.

The above Qur'ānic passage is rooted in history and geography. Contained in it, however, is a lesson for men of all time and place, cutting across faith and nationality labels. For these verses state a universal truth and bring into sharp relief the workings of the human mind which is worth studying.

The weakness innate in human nature is that man soon becomes fed up with comfort, luxury, peace and tranquillity. Man hates monotony and loves change. Such change might even entail hardship for him. Man is however apt to behave thus, as is specified in the following Qur'ānic verse: *And how many populations We destroyed that exulted in their life of ease and plenty.* (*Qaṣaṣ* 28:58).

The story of the people of Saba' brings to our attention an important aspect of human nature. Let us not miss this significant point. Rather, we should take a lesson from it for Allah recounted these stories for this very purpose. In verse 111 of *Sūrah Yūsuf* it is stressed that these stories are for the admonition of those who act on reason. Elsewhere the Qur'ān says that these stories are recounted so that men may reflect on them (verse 176 of *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*).

The Qur'ān is not some chronicle of history and social life. It relates its accounts of earlier communities, presents glimpses of social life and projects features of past cultures and civilisations for man to

take heed. Psychologists and historians, in particular, should study this part of the Qur'ān, for it relates what is universal and common to man down the ages. It is worth exploring how the Qur'ān presents a vivid picture of the life of the people of Saba'. Reading the Qur'ānic version one learns about their flourishing economy, prosperity and affluence. Their success was the envy of others. Men in general and conquerors in particular aspire for such success and glory. Emperors fervently seek such a feat. The following passage provides more details about the people of Saba':

> *There was for Saba' in the days of yore a sign in their homeland – two gardens to the right and to the left. "Eat of the sustenance provided by your Lord and be grateful to Him, a territory fair and happy and the Ever-Forgiving Lord." But they turned away from Allah, and We sent against them floods released from dams and We converted their two gardens into gardens producing bitter fruit and tamarisks, and a few stunted Lote trees.*
>
> (*Saba'* 34:15-16)

In the above passage the Qur'ān diagnoses the malaise afflicting these people. It explains why the calamity befell them and why they were deprived of their success and joy. Their luxury and affluence abruptly came to an end. For the Qur'ān clearly states that Allah had blessed their towns and that they enjoyed peace and happiness, which enabled them to travel in security both by day and night, (verse 18 of *Sūrah Saba'*). One learns from *tafsīr* literature that the people of Saba' lived in a healthy environment. They were blessed by the best of climates and were safe against epidemics. If a stranger carried some insects there, these were instantly killed in such a healthy environment. There were no beasts or harmful animals around their cities. Allah had appointed several cities on prominent positions. These cities were close to one another and were well connected by road. Travellers did not face any hardship in moving from one place to another, for they did not have to worry about an overnight stay

or attacks by robbers. They also enjoyed excellent hospitality at inns. Thus they could travel smoothly and safely from one city to another. Furthermore, their transportation was of a good standard.

In sum, Allah had blessed the people of Saba' in every respect. They found travelling easy and comfortable. Their cities were located a short distance from each other. Yet they did not appreciate these divine bounties. Such weakness is innate in human nature. They should have been grateful to Allah for all that they had. They should have been constantly engaged in praising and glorifying Him. However, they acted very differently. What they asked for instead was that the distance between their cities be extended, which would involve longer and harder journeys. They did not value the short distance which had made their travel thus far easy and enjoyable. They did not appreciate such facilities. Rather, they asked for longer, tiring journeys. They were more interested in traversing vast deserts and horrible forests. They preferred danger and hazard to the easy and comfortable life they enjoyed.

As a result, Allah deprived them of His favours. They were dispersed across various countries. Thus their existence was turned into a tale.

Generally, the above incident is taken lightly. One is left wondering how human nature had degenerated so far. The people of Saba' had attained much advancement in culture and civilisation. They enjoyed a comfortable life. Yet corruption crept into their lives and they took to the path of disobedience and wickedness. It is hard to think of any plausible reason as to why they acted so irrationally. However, this incident is reported by the Qur'ān. We know that the Qur'ān is the Word of Allah and does not contain anything false. Rather it embodies divine revelation which represents only truth.

The Qur'ān related this account of the people of Saba'. Allah is All-Aware, All-Wise, and All-Knowing. He knows well that there currently exist some disobedient and wicked communities, who seem intent on following in the footsteps of the people of Saba'. They too, act strangely, seeking adventure and risk. They too are keen to take challenges on

board. They too have grown complacent about natural resources, no longer appreciating the abundance of bounties which are at their disposal. Under the influence of misleading propaganda and external factors they tend to prefer a life of poverty and resourcelessness. For this reason the Qur'ān recorded the story of the people of Saba'. This story is not however found in historical works. For history records mainly things about rulers, and generally is not concerned with relating such events as provide lessons for mankind.

In contrast to history, the Qur'ān does not deal with the rise and fall of each and every community, changes of rulers and their conquests. Instead, it focuses its attention on human weaknesses. Its main interest lies in conveying lessons to men of all places and times.

6. Life-after-death

أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّىٰ يُحْيِي هَٰذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ
مَوْتِهَا ۖ فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ ۖ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ ۖ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ
يَوْمٍ ۖ قَالَ بَل لَّبِثْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ ۖ
وَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ حِمَارِكَ وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِّلنَّاسِ ۖ وَانظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ
كَيْفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا لَحْمًا ۚ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ
عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٥٩﴾

Take the parable of one who passed by a hamlet, all in ruins to its roofs. He said: "Oh! How shall Allah bring it to life after its death?" But Allah caused him to die, for a hundred years, then raised him up again. Allah asked: "How long did you tarry thus?" He said: "Perhaps a day or part of a day." Allah said: "No, you have tarried thus a hundred years. But look at your food and your drink. They show no signs of age. And look

at your donkey and that We may make of you a sign unto the people. Look further at its bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh." When this was shown clearly to him, he said: "I know that Allah has power over everything."
(*al-Baqarah* 2:259)

Notwithstanding Muslims' inadequate study of the Qur'ān, the above passage contains a wealth of meaning, far beyond its elucidation offered by writers of *tafsīr* down the ages. The meaning of the Qur'ān comes out more vividly in the light of the latest developments in knowledge and tools of understanding.

I have been fortunate enough to be a student of the Qur'ān, having devoted my life to grasping its meaning and message. The above passage recounts a particular event, which is reflective of Allah's power. Generally speaking, food rots within a few hours. However, in this particular case, Allah preserved its freshness for one hundred years. The passage brings home the truth about the Next Life. It hints at spiritual regeneration, the historic role of a community and how its call is renewed. The passage also reiterates the importance of true faith, which once permeated every aspect of the Muslim community's life. In time, however, Muslims gradually lost their fervour. Contained in it also is the allusion to the series of conquests which Muslims once recorded. The underlying message is that, at times, Allah reinvigorates a community and its message even after one hundred years, and in the face of its apparent weakness. As Allah is able to preserve such a perishable item as food for so long, He can easily revive faith after a lapse of one hundred years.

In my opinion, all the above meanings are implied. Let us not, therefore, assume that the fate of Turkey is sealed and that it is destined to remain for ever an un-Islamic country. It is not preordained that Turkey will be immersed for ever in ignorance and darkness.

A pointed reference is made in the above passage to food and drink which remained unaffected. Using the same logic, divine guidance embodying a life-sustaining message can never become out of date,

for it alone ensures mankind's deliverance. This truth is stated in the Qur'ān thus: *And Allah would never make your faith of no effect. For Allah is surely full of kindness and mercy to all people.* (*al-Baqarah* 2:143)

This verse holds out much hope and renews our confidence. It boosts our morale, putting to rest despair and scepticism. Since Allah does not let ordinary food rot, the Muslim community stands a fair chance of survival. For the message assigned to Muslims is of immense benefit and value for the whole of mankind.

To me, the Qur'ān contains glad tidings that Turkey and the Turks who were for centuries a force to be reckoned with in Europe will soon be reinvigorated. Islam will be revived in its full glory: *You [Allah] cause night to gain on day and cause day to gain on night. You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:27)

7. Preserving Islam for future generations

أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَآءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنۢ
بَعْدِى قَالُوا۟ نَعْبُدُ إِلَٰهَكَ وَإِلَٰهَ ءَابَآئِكَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسْمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَٰقَ إِلَٰهًا
وَٰحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

Were you present when death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said to his sons: "What will you worship after me?" They said: "We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers – of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, the One True God, to Him we bow [in Islam]."

(*al-Baqarah* 2:133)

This verse appears in the early part of the Qur'ān. It is then worth studying why Allah accorded such importance to this event. Whatever is linked with Allah is meaningful and helps man gain proximity with Him. It protects one against numerous threats. If one studies this

passage causally, it will appear to one as no more than an event that preceded the Prophet Jacob's demise. Reading it without attention one is liable to miss its legal, historical, cultural and inner meanings. Allah states that what is in the Qur'ān is to be read until the Last Day. Allah has therefore, included in it only such material which provokes man's reflection and which is bound to provide many lessons. Let us first note the universal truth enunciated in the passage. Everyone who is born is mortal. One has to return to Allah at the expiry of one's life span. This universal law applies to the Messenger of Allah as well.

Regarding the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) the Qur'ān specifically says that notwithstanding his being a Messenger of Allah, he is mortal. Like other messengers he too will pass away one day. He has to return to Allah, as is ordained by Him. Undoubtedly, he will enjoy close proximity with Allah. Yet as a mortal human being he will face death. Given this, it is all the more perplexing as to why so much attention is focused on the Prophet Jacob's demise. Many of us read and fail to appreciate the underlying meaning behind this passage.

While Muslims are addressed, the Qur'ān asks them: "Were you present when death appeared before Jacob?" This is a feature special to the Qur'ān. As it projects something graphically, evoking the full attention of its audience, it follows the above technique. At that time, when the Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him) was breathing his last, he asked his sons as to what they would worship after him.

Let us recall that the above incident involves the Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him), son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. He was also the nephew of the Prophet Ishmael (peace and blessings be upon him). In sum, he belonged to the illustrious family of Allah's messengers. Of them, special mention should be made of the prophets Abraham and Ishmael (peace and blessings be upon them). Allah dubbed the former as His friend and the latter is the progenitor of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The Prophet Jacob's son was Joseph, who too, was Allah's

messenger. Generally speaking, at the time of his death, a Muslim does not ask the question posed by the Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him). This holds true even of devout Muslims – scholars and spiritual masters alike – for they assume that they have already instructed their children in the fundamentals of Islam, the concept of Allah and the creedal statement of Islam. Their children bear Muslim names and the adults among them, whom Allah enables, go to the mosque and offer prayers there. The young ones see their elders praying. Likewise, the names of Allah and His messengers are mentioned in their homes. All this made Muslims complacent and hence on their deathbed they did not verify the faith of their children.

If one were to collect the wills of deceased persons, one would gather a large collection. Some of these are marked by historical insight and literary features, and reflect the workings of the human psyche. On studying the wills of *'Ulamā'*, religious leaders, reformers, activists, rulers and officials, one gets a fair idea of the relationship between parents and children. These epitomise human feelings, emotions, wisdom and intellectual brilliance. These unravel the interplay of man's intricate psychology. Reading these one is struck by the unity of human emotions. Most men are found giving almost identical pieces of advice, irrespective of their different eras and varying mental, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. They often impart the advice of patience to their near and dear ones. They advise their children to maintain unity and not to quarrel over their inheritance. Some instruct them to repay any debt owed by them. Others ask them to realise the loans lent by them. It is common for them to hand over legal papers. Some of them who are God-conscious and religious insist that the loans borrowed by them be repaid. This is the general thrust of wills left behind by the deceased.

In the case under study the children of Allah's messengers were involved. We love and respect them, for they were trained by the messengers themselves. They were witness to the markedly religious ambience of their home, marked by prayers, remembrance of Allah,

and supplications and invocations to Him. They had seen their mothers turning fervently to Allah in every crisis. They had not come across the name of any deity, for they knew Allah alone as the supreme Lord. They looked upon only Allah as All-Powerful, holding His sway over the universe and Master of all loss and gain. They recognised only Him as the source of all hope and fear. These children were unaware of any doctrine other than that of monotheism. Likewise, they knew only prayers and fasting as religious obligations.

Yet the Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him) is seen in this passage as not taking any chances. When one is particular about something, one does not leave anything to chance, indulging in speculation. In a crisis one frankly expresses what ails one. For example, if one falls ill, one informs one's children of one's pain and clearly asks them to call in a physician. The same holds true for an extremely hungry person. He is unable to exercise much self-restraint and unabashedly asks for food. This applies equally to members of the élite and ruling classes. It is hence worth studying why the Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him) summoned his children and other family members, asking them what he did.

These were his last moments. He did not have much time and energy left. Some people intuitively know about their approaching death. The Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him) being the messenger of Allah had some inkling about his last hour. He realised well that he was about to die. He spoke his last words to his family, words which were markedly different from those uttered by other dying people. Generally, wills instruct inheritors not to fight among themselves, to lead life honourably and decently, to take special care of female and young members of the family and to maintain ties of kinship. This has been the trend for centuries. However, the Prophet Jacob (peace and blessings be upon him) raised an issue which was very dear to him. He took it as a highly significant and decisive matter on which hinged the eternal success of his children. Any lapse on his part on this count, he thought, would incur a serious loss for them. He was very particular about the issue which he discussed with them.

For him, the most important issue was the preservation of the faith of his children, their thorough grounding in faith and their adherence to true faith until their last breath. With this aim in mind he assembled them. As he passed away at a ripe age, his grandchildren would have been beside him as well. His nephews and other close relatives too, must have gathered. At that critical moment he pointedly asked them the question: "*What will you worship after me?*" He wanted to ascertain the level of their faith, which would put his mind at rest. This was his only concern. The Qur'ān and other works do not refer to any other issue raised by him on his deathbed. His attention was focused solely on the object of worship by his children.

The Qur'ān recounts this event for a variety of considerations. He posed a specific question and received a pointed reply. They affirmed their unwavering belief in the Oneness of the One True God. The Qur'ān does not record any other details of this meeting. His children might have expressed their surprise over the question set by him, for he had thoroughly instructed them in monotheism. Moreover, they had been witness to the profession and practice of monotheism in their home. Being the sons and grandsons of the messengers of Allah they were firm believers. They were his own progeny who could not deviate an inch from his faith. The Qur'ān, nonetheless, recounts only their prompt and reassuring reply to the question: "*We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers.*" They affirmed their allegiance to the faith of their ancestors, for they had been eloquently warned against the dreadful consequences of polytheism. In professing the faith of such illustrious forefathers as the prophets Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael and Jacob (peace and blessings be upon them), they made it plain that they would prefer death to indulging in polytheism. Thus they reassured Jacob, that they would continue to adhere to their ancestral faith. They declared their firm belief in the One True God. Their vow thus satisfied him on his deathbed.

This is how every Muslim should behave. He should always be on guard regarding his faith. He should supplicate to Allah to enable him to profess and practise Islam until his last breath. It is the best

end for him to die in a state of Islam. He should also ensure that his children adhere as well to the true faith and that they never turn to anyone besides Allah. Securing this assurance from them is very important. Indeed, one should make a point of so doing. Apart from practising faith Muslims should denounce disbelief. For Allah loves those who loathe false gods and turn to Him alone. Whoever rejects Satan and believes in Allah holds on to a firm bond. For true faith it is essential, in equal degree, to reject fully all that disbelief stands for. Allah should be Muslims' only object of worship. Rejection of disbelief precedes the affirmation of true faith. We should better bear these points in mind.

The verse quoted at the outset of this reminder reflects the ideal mould of a Muslim. In recording this event, the Qur'ān has preserved a role model until the Last Day. Every Muslim is supposed not only to read this passage, but also draw lessons from it. The Qur'ān is not very particular about relating historical events, it is not after all some work of history. Instead, we should look at this passage, as indeed all others, as instructing us in how to lead our lives.

8. Utter loss

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَعۡبُدُ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرۡفٖۖ فَإِنۡ أَصَابَهُۥ خَيۡرٌ ٱطۡمَأَنَّ بِهِۦۖ وَإِنۡ أَصَابَتۡهُ فِتۡنَةٌ ٱنقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجۡهِهِۦ خَسِرَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡخُسۡرَانُ ٱلۡمُبِينُ ﴿١١﴾

There are some among men who serve Allah, as it were, on the verge. If good comes to them, they are well content. But if a trial comes to them, they turn on their faces. They lose both this world and the Hereafter. That is loss for all to see.

(*al-Ḥajj* 22:11)

This passage is indicative of the miraculous quality and graphic nature of the Qur'ān, for it holds a mirror to the mindset of both individuals and communities. There are men and nations who submitted to Allah almost nominally. Reference here is made not only to their observance of religious duties but also to their obedience of Allah and their adherence to Islamic laws. There is a very thin line marked here between *jāhiliyyah* and Islam. The Qur'ānic representation of such people's mental state and response system is vivid. They sit on the fence, which enables them to change their stance in no time at all. They do not take a firm stand which renders it difficult for them to recant their earlier one. Instead, they are perfect opportunists and self-seekers. They keep a close eye on state policy and what might please the ruling class. All the time they think only of their loss and gain.

If the conditions of the day suit them, they are fully engrossed in pursuing their objectives. Without any qualms of conscience they carry on their agenda, which comprises selfish ends. In adverse circumstances and in line with any changed stance by the ruling class they instantly recant their earlier position. They no longer want to be identified with what they once believed and supported. In short, they have no problem at all in abandoning their outward appearance, their beliefs and views, their socio-cultural lives and their language.

On observing the misconduct of these opportunists and time servers one appreciates better the import of this Qur'ānic passage. As long as such people expect to derive some material gain from their association with Islam, they make a show of their allegiance to it, for it helps them obtain wealth or worldly position. However, if they sense any loss on account of their link with Islam, they have no hesitation in abandoning Islam altogether. Incapable of taking any risk, they sever all ties with Islam. This point is brought home thus in the Qur'ān:

> *There are such among men who say: "We believe in Allah", but when they suffer affliction in the cause of Allah, they treat*

men's oppression as if it were the wrath of Allah. And if help comes [to you from your Lord, O Prophet], they are sure to say: "We have always been with you." Does not Allah know best what is in the hearts of creatures?

(*al-ʿAnkabūt* 29:10)

If Islam might bring them glory, they take great pride in their association with it by recalling their Muslim ancestors. They are keen only to receive a share of Allah's bounty which is bestowed on Muslims. However, Allah knows the truth.

There is no credit in pledging one's loyalty to the ruling class or the group enjoying power and authority. Although in favourable circumstances one is likely to gain advantage from this link, the real test nonetheless is in adverse circumstances. It calls for manly spirit and unwavering resolve to profess and practise some belief or principle when people in general are hostile to it. In such a situation even loyalists are shaken. One's allegiance to a group that is fighting for survival is one's real trial. Only the most loyal person displays his sincerity in unfavourable circumstances.

It is one's privilege to express one's loyalty to Islam and to observe it outwardly in one's daily life. One will be rewarded for this in all circumstances, both adverse and favourable. At a time Islam and Muslims enjoyed ascendancy. Those loyal to it were rewarded amply. Those adhering to their beliefs, principles and inner voice and working for the cause of truth experience ecstasy even in this life. For they are imbued with the spirit of thanking and glorifying Allah.

[XIII]
Qur'ānic Stories

1. The story of the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him)

ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّيٓ ۚ إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَهُم
بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ هُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَٱتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ ءَابَآءِىٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْحَٰقَ
وَيَعْقُوبَ ۚ ... ﴿٣٨﴾

[Joseph said:] "That is part of the duty which my Lord has taught me. I have abandoned the ways of the people who do not believe in Allah and even deny the Hereafter. I follow the ways of my fathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

(*Yūsuf* 12:37-38)

When his two fellow prisoners approached the Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) seeking an interpretation of their dreams, he obliged them, adding that he had been granted this special knowledge by Allah.

The conversation between them started on a dramatic note. It perhaps goes without saying that good, instructive conversation should be initiated on a decent note. All the norms of good conversation

should be followed. Otherwise, its beauty and impact are lost. To use an analogy, a palatial building should open with an impressive gate, bringing to mind the grandeur of the building. It should facilitate one's entry.

The Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) commenced his dialogue on an apt note. First, he assured them that he would interpret their dreams for them. This comforted them, for they knew they would get what they wanted. They were happy over their choice of the right person to assist them. Moreover, they soon realised that they had selected a competent person who would deliver the goods, and were confident that he would show them a way out of their predicament.

It is perfectly natural and logical that one wants that one's needs be met first. If one calls on a physician, and the latter refuses to pay one any attention and instead tells one to visit at some later time, one is naturally disappointed. So much so that one will not return to such a physician. It is important then in such circumstances that the other person be reassuring, giving the impression that he can cater for one's needs. The Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) acted in this exact same natural manner. He first assured his two inmates, promising to tell them the interpretation of their dreams before their food was served. In other words, he offered a prompt and positive response to their request for help. Being inmates and subject to prison regulations they could not stay for long with him. He therefore, assured them of a quick response.

What he said could be construed as self-praise. He therefore immediately clarified that it was his Lord Who had instructed him in such knowledge. Let us reconstruct the conditions in which the above dialogue took place. The only comparable conditions existed in the Prophet Muḥammad's day, for the whole episode is characterised by a tactful call to the truth. The note on which the dialogue opens points to the strategy which must be followed in inviting people to the truth. The Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) utilised an ordinary everyday life situation to bring home the truth of Allah's

Oneness. He used this opportunity to deliver a forceful sermon on monotheism. Tactfully, he changed the course of the conversation, making it acceptable to his listeners. He promised them help. At the same time he made them share the special knowledge imparted to him by Allah. Furthermore, he also explained the reason why he was granted that special knowledge. It had helped him give up the false faith of his community. This special knowledge was not the product of his own mind. Nor was it exclusive to his family. It was an altogether different point that in his own right he was an exceptionally intelligent person and that he was a scion of an illustrious family. Yet he made no such claim. Rather, he stated his faith, rejecting the faith of his people who did not believe in Allah and the Next Life. He received his special knowledge as a reward for his renouncing false beliefs. He dissociated himself from the unbelievers. Rather, he adhered to the faith of his righteous ancestors – the prophets Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (peace and blessings be upon them). This was followed by his insightful sermon on monotheism. He asked his fellow inmates to reflect on something more serious than their dreams. Articles of faith are of the utmost importance to man. Dreams are unreal and have no bearing on this and the Next Life. What is more important is this life leading to the Next One, for the latter involves eternity. Even if no one interpreted their dreams, they would not have suffered any loss. However, if they failed to discover the meaning of life, the purpose of their existence and the Creator and Master of this universe, they would ruin their prospects in both worlds. Joseph, thus, instructed them in these truths only as much as was necessary. He knew well that they had a particular purpose for which they had approached him. They were emotionally upset and would not listen to a long sermon. Accordingly, he discussed these truths with them in balanced measure. He did not tax their patience beyond their capacity.

His sense of proportion is indeed striking. He delivered his talk to fellow prisoners in a well balanced manner. Far from delving into the depths of faith, he instructed them only in the basic articles of faith. He talked about monotheism but not in such detail as would

annoy them, for their immediate concern was the interpretation of their dreams. He stopped before they lost interest in his sermon. Furthermore, he sensed that they were receptive to listening, as they were in a crisis. Thus he availed himself of this opportunity and presented before them the truth of monotheism. He made his point so subtly it could not antagonise them, nor did they have any reason or opportunity to lodge a protest.

It is bewildering that this entire episode has been deleted from the Bible. This amply proves that the Bible has been tampered with whereas the Qur'ān is the pure Word of God. The Prophet Joseph (peace and blessings be upon him) talked to them only as much as was within their capacity. For being needy they were keen to resolve their problem. First, he offered them such talk which brought to them confidence and satisfaction, assuring them of the interpretation of their dreams at the earliest. He promised them help before food was served. This put their minds at rest. While they became calm and quiet, he imparted to them his message of monotheism.

2. The story of the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) and Khiḍr

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَٰمًا فَقَتَلَهُۥ قَالَ أَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةًۢ بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ
جِئْتَ شَيْـًٔا نُّكْرًا ﴿٧٤﴾ ...
وَأَمَّا ٱلْغُلَٰمُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَآ أَن يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَٰنًا
وَكُفْرًا ﴿٨٠﴾ فَأَرَدْنَآ أَن يُبْدِلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُ زَكَوٰةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا ﴿٨١﴾

Then they proceeded until when thy met a young man, he slew him. Moses said: "Have you slain an innocent person who had slain no one? Truly you have done a foul thing ..."

[He clarified:] "As for the youth, his parents were believers and we feared that he would grieve them by his obstinate rebellion

and ingratitude [to Allah and men]. So we desired that their Lord would give them in exchange a son better in purity of conduct and closer in affection."

(*al-Kahf* 18:74 and 80-81)

In my considered opinion, the most important covenant relates to faith. Let us realise clearly and deeply that faith is far more valuable than even life. We should imbibe this truth in our hearts and minds acknowledging too that our child's faith is more precious than his health and life itself.

This truth comes out in light of the above Qur'ānic passage. I am always struck with awe on reading this. Little attention however has been paid to the truth embodied in it. Some of my worthy predecessors of the classical period and some leading scholars of the Qur'ān might have noted its underlying message which we cannot readily grasp. However, readers of our own time pay scant attention to the truths interspersed in Qur'ānic stories.

The story of the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) and Khiḍr features in the later part of *Sūrah al-Kahf*. The latter killed a youth in the presence of such a distinguished messenger of Allah as the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him). When he asked Khiḍr to explain his conduct, particularly the crime for which he had killed the youth, he replied that he had done so in consideration of faith. The parents of the youth were sincere believers while this youth was likely to pose a risk to that faith. Khiḍr explained that he had actually rescued the parents by taking away the boy's life. Furthermore, Allah could easily bless them with another child who would not so spoil their faith. Today, even a truly Islamic state cannot act in the above fashion. For it is not permissible in Islam to kill someone for fear that he will jeopardise the faith of others at a later date. Killing someone is a very serious crime. Given this, one is faced with the question as to why the Qur'ān has recorded this story as part of *Sūrah al-Kahf*. We know that the Qur'ān being the eternal Book will be studied until the end of time. It has been related to let readers realise the importance of faith. Though no one is allowed

to act as Khiḍr did, everyone should get the message contained in Khiḍr's action. In the *Sharīʿah* it is forbidden to kill anyone without just cause. Let us then reflect on Khiḍr's behaviour for he was after all the companion of a prophet.

The message is unmistakable. For the sake of preserving and defending faith, Khiḍr, who was an illustrious spiritual figure and one who enjoyed proximity with Allah, killed the youth. This incident is duly recorded in the Qur'ān. One should thus realise that faith is very precious and whatever is liable to impair it should be eliminated outright. One should sacrifice everything in this cause, no matter how dear it might be. It is a pity we no longer think and act along these lines.

Another insightful point implicit in this Qur'ānic story is that both the Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) and Khiḍr visited a town and saw there a wall which was about to collapse. As they were guests in that town and did not carry any food, they expected local hospitality. However, no one took care of them and they suffered from lack of sustenance. Yet Khiḍr spent his time and energy on repairing the collapsing wall. This was a hard task, for first Khiḍr had to arrange for materials and then exert himself in restoring the wall. The Prophet Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) was bewildered by the diametrically opposite conduct of Khiḍr and of the town's inhabitants. Since the latter had not provided hospitality, he thought the former should not have performed them any favour. In effect, he should have left them to fend for themselves, so that they would have to spend time and money on the repair work. However, Khiḍr explained his conduct thus:

> *As for the wall, it belonged to two youths, orphans in the town. Beneath it was a buried treasure to which these two youths were entitled. Their father was a pious person. So your Lord desired that these two youths should attain the age of their full strength and get out their treasure, a mercy and favour from your Lord.*
>
> (*al-Kahf* 18:82)

Had the wall collapsed, the buried treasure would have been exposed and usurped by the dwellers of the town. As a result, these youths would have faced poverty and suffering. It would have rendered them penniless. At one end of the scale, Khiḍr killed a youth for the sake of faith, and at the other, he carried out hard physical work without charge to help someone who had been a sincere believer. Although that pious person had died long ago, Khiḍr was drawn towards him in view of his true faith. Hence he did the painstaking job of restoring the wall. As a result, the treasure for his sons was saved.

Both of these events are narrated in the same *sūrah* in order to bring out the distinction between faith and disbelief. The youth who could jeopardise faith was killed whereas a sincere, pious believer was rewarded for his faith. In this way his orphan sons were assured of receiving the treasure which was legitimately theirs. It was, however, Allah who had arranged for the safety and security of their treasure, inspiring Khiḍr as He did to rebuild the wall. Let us then realise the value of faith. One is not of course authorised to kill anyone, taking him as a threat to faith. Rather, on sensing some threat to faith, in the manner of Khiḍr repairing the wall which was about to collapse, one should strengthen one's faith. One should ensure that one and one's children are as steady in faith as a wall. In sum, every measure should be taken to fortify faith. If we recognise the importance of faith for ourselves and our children, we will accord it more attention than catering merely for the physical and material needs of our children. Their clothes, education, health and other needs would not be taken as so important by us.

What is most important is to infuse true faith in their hearts and minds. We should take such steps that they do not abandon faith. I will say with all the command at my disposal that faith should be given the utmost importance in all our lives.

3. The message of the Qur'ān

لَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

We have revealed for you [O men!] a Book in which is a message for you. Will you then not understand?

(*al-Anbiyā'* 21:10)

The above Qur'ānic verse contains a wealth of meaning. One learns that the Qur'ān is like a transparently clear mirror in which everyone can see their own image reflected. One realises on studying it what role one has to play in society. Likewise, one finds in its light the way to gain proximity with Allah. For the Qur'ān deals, in the main, with man – his conduct and character. Contained in it are some role models for man. More importantly, it is concerned solely with man, his features and conditions. Little wonder then that classical *'Ulamā'* looked upon it as a lively Book, holding out as a mirror to the human condition. They did not take it as some archaic work, dealing with dated history and communities of yore. They recognised that it is concerned with man's everyday life, with the ever-changing situations faced by man and the varying challenges contingent upon time and space.

Our worthy ancestors knew well their strengths and weaknesses. They recognised reality. They derived all their guidance from the Qur'ān. To resolve their problems they turned to it and found in its pages the images of their mindset and features. As a result, they did not have much difficulty in identifying solutions to their problems. They thanked and glorified Allah for this, sought His forgiveness and strove to mend their ways.

On reading the above verse I recall the incident related to Aḥnaf ibn Qays, a leading successor to the Prophet's Companions. He was a confidant of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and was renowned for his forbearance. Yet on a religious issue his fury was uncontrollable. His fury, in turn, provoked many others, as is recorded by Abū

ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad ibn al-Naṣr al-Marūzī (d. 275 H) in his *Qiyām al-Layl*. Al-Marūzī was a distinguished student of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Most probably al-Marūzī wrote the above book during his stay in Baghdad.

It is related that one day when Aḥnaf ibn Qays heard someone reciting the above verse, he was struck by it. He studied the Qur'ān with the specific aim of finding out how the Qur'ān projects man and places him in which category. He applied this study to himself. During this study, he noted in particular the following verses:

> *They were in the habit of sleeping but little by night. And in the hours of early dawn they were found praying for forgiveness. And in their wealth and possessions there was the right of the needy ones who asked and of those who did not ask.*
>
> (*al-Dhāriyāt* 51:17-19)

> *Their limbs do forsake their beds of sleep, the while they call on their Lord, in fear and hope. And they spend in charity out of the sustenance which We have bestowed on them.*
>
> (*al-Sajdah* 32:16)

Another verse speaks highly of true believers on the following grounds: *They spend nights in adoration of their Lord, prostrate and standing.* (*al-Furqān* 25:64) And: *They spend generously whether in prosperity or in adversity, restrain anger and pardon all men. For Allah loves those who do good.* (*Āl ʿImrān* 3:134)

Aḥnaf ibn Qays also identified the following Qur'ānic passages which project a role model:

> *[The Madīnan Anṣār] give them [the Makkan Muhājirīn] preference over themselves, even though poverty was their own lot. Those saved from the base desires of their own selves, they are the ones who achieve prosperity.* (*al-Ḥashr* 59:9) *They avoid major sins and shameful deeds, and when they are angry, even*

then they forgive. They listen to their Lord, establish regular prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation and spend out of what We bestowed upon them for sustenance.

(*al-Shūrā* 42:37-38)

His quest led to the following contrasting characters as well:

When they were told that there is no god besides Allah they were puffed up with pride. They used to say: "What! Shall we give up our gods for the sake of a mad poet?" (*al-Ṣāffāt* 37:35-36) *When Allah, the One and Only, is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter are filled with disgust. However, when gods other than Allah are mentioned, they are filled with joy.*

(*al-Zumar* 39:45)

The Qur'ān provides a graphic account of the unbelievers and the interrogation they will face: *[They will be asked] what led you into Hellfire? They will say: "We were not the ones who prayed. Nor did we feed the poor. But we used to indulge in vain talk along with vain talkers. And we used to deny the Day of Judgement until death overtook us."* (*al-Muddaththir* 74:42-47)

On reading the unbelievers' description Aḥnaf paused and declared: "O Allah! I am quit of them." His attention was then focused on the following verse: *There are some who have admitted their wrongdoings. They have mixed a good act with an evil act. Perhaps Allah will turn to them in mercy. For Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.* (*al-Tawbah* 9:102)

He exclaimed on studying the above: "O Allah! I am also one of them."

Let us then do our own soul-searching in light of the Qur'ān. For the Qur'ān contains both glad tidings and warnings. Apart from presenting a profile of pious believers, it also sketches polytheists and unbelievers. The Qur'ān represents both individuals and communities. Take the following as illustrative:

There is a type of man whose speech about this world's life may allure you, and he calls Allah to witness about what is in his heart yet he is the most contentious of enemies. When he turns his back, his aim is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle. But Allah does not approve mischief. When it is said to him: "Fear Allah", he is led by arrogance to more crimes. Enough for his is Hell – an evil bed indeed to lie on.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:204-206)

Contrast this with the following: *And there is a type of man who gives his life to earn the pleasure of Allah. And Allah is full of kindness to His servants.* (*al-Baqarah* 2:207)

The Qur'ān speaks thus of a community:

O Believers! If any from among you turn back from his faith, Allah will soon produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him – lowly with the believers, mighty against the unbelievers, fighting in the way of Allah and never afraid of the reproach of those who find fault. That is the grace of Allah which He will bestow upon whom He pleases. Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing.

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:54)

This is followed by the description of another community: *Among the believers are men who are true to their covenant with Allah. Of them some have fulfilled their pledge and some still wait. But they have not changed their resolve in the least.* (*al-Aḥzāb* 33:23)

The Qur'ān urges man to express gratitude to Allah and condemns ungratefulness, pride, and misconduct on man's part. It warns man against the dire consequences of disbelief. This point is illustrated by a parable about the people of a town who disregarded Allah's bounties and boasted of their affluence:

Allah sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and peace, and abundantly supplied with sustenance from all sides. Yet

they were ungrateful to the favours of Allah. So Allah made them taste hunger and terror in extremes, closing in on them like a garment because of the evil which they had wrought.
(*al-Naḥl* 16:112)

The Qur'ān has presented such contrasting types, as for example, the tyrannical Pharaoh or the transgressing chief Hāmān or the miserly, arrogant Korah or the wicked people of ʿĀd and craftsmen such as the Thamūd. These types are universal, not restricted to time and place. Rather, these are indicative of the human failings which are reflected in all time and place. The Qur'ān also informs us of the terrible end of these types. It is clearly stated that those who follow in their footsteps and take them as their leaders, will meet the same end which befell them: *It is the practice approved by Allah among those of old who have passed away. And the command of Allah is a determined decree.* (*al-Aḥzāb* 33:38)

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